

# Spurtle



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**November  
2017**

**No 268**

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**BROUGHTON'S INDEPENDENT STIRRER Free**

## RBS SCALES BACK HEIGHT OF HOUSING

As predicted in Issue 267, major revisions are being made to the outline proposal for development of Royal Bank of Scotland's site behind Dundas Street.

At a presentation last month to the New Town & Broughton Community Council, representatives of development agents GVA and architects Michael Laird explained outline plans for four 4-storey blocks (1.7 storeys above street level) on Royal Crescent, stepped back from the park behind and with living green roofs. These are significantly smaller and more 'organically shaped' than the 8-storey giants which appeared last time round. It remains to be seen whether the revised heights will satisfy locals or Historic Environment Scotland, which had argued for a maximum 1.5 storeys above street level.

Changes have also been made to the other residential blocks facing Fettes Row. These have been reduced by 1 storey and paired together with an infill of up to 3 storeys. They will now match the height of the current RBS building.

The changes represent a loss of 50 units, and a 10 per cent reduction in the number of likely residents. They will be presented 'soon' as an addendum to the earlier environmental impact assessment (Ref. 16/05454/PPP), after which the public will have 3-4 weeks in which to comment.

## DRUMMOND WANDERERS RETURN VICTORIOUS



Meet Broughton's world beaters: Dominic Hawthorn, John Foxwell, Marcus Mackenzie and Bruce McKerracher. The players from Drummond Tennis Club recently retained their team title at the World Stone Skimming Championships on Easdale Island. It is admittedly a niche claim to fame, but no less worth celebrating for that.

## PICARDY PLACE LAYOUT - STILL ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT

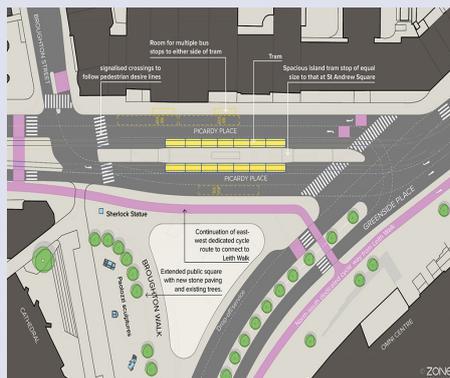
Widespread criticism greeted CEC proposals for a Picardy Place gyratory in late September, and the seemingly indecent haste with which they were being pushed through. Concerns included undue prioritisation of motor traffic over cyclists and pedestrians, and too little attention to the input of expert stakeholders such as Spokes and Sustrans.

Transport & Environment Convener Lesley Macinnes promptly extended consultation beyond the already extended 5 October deadline to 7 December (see our website 14.9.17, 23.9.17 and 2.10.17), and then again to January so that fuller consideration could be given to the design of the central space.

However, it became clear early on that no fundamental rethink of the gyratory is envisaged as it is already embedded in the Council's Growth Accelerator Model contract with St James Quarter developers and the Scottish Government worth £60m. Any changes would require the consent of both partners, with the Government unwilling to release further funds and the developers wary of costly over-runs.

Edinburgh's Executive Director of Place Paul Lawrence portrays the gyratory as an 'optimal' compromise between competing transport and active travel needs. But critics say it's an outdated solution, prioritising traffic flow over public amenity and a sense of place.

Meanwhile alternative proposals (like the one here) have featured on our website on 5, 10, 13 and 24 October, and Lawrence has publicly conceded that increasing the size of the paved 'blister' in front of the Cathedral, and reducing the size of the central road-ringed area, would not be impractical or unaffordable.



## MOVING FORWARD ON GEORGE STREET

The Council has awarded a contract worth £289,400 to redesign George Street. The walking and cycling charity Sustrans will provide CEC with up to £120,000 in 2017/18 for any additional work it may need to do.

WYG Environment Transport Planning Ltd were appointed in September to come up with a preliminary design, and as part of the George Street and First New Town Project (GNT) have been briefed to carefully take into account intersecting Castle, Frederick and Hanover Streets, Charlotte and St Andrew Squares, and the City Centre West to East Cycle Link.

The WYG/ETP design team comprises experts in landscape architecture, planning, transport and public engagement. Their work will build on earlier research (2014-16) culminating in a report by Ironside Farrar last year (our website 3.6.16). They will present preliminary designs for consultation in March and June 2018.

GNT is itself part of the Transport & Environment Committee's Central Edinburgh Transformation, which involves 'rethinking transport priorities across the city, in order to deliver streets and a public realm that better meet the needs of residents, pedestrians, cyclists, and provide a more integrated public transport network'. It recognises that 'the wider city also relies on central Edinburgh for its working and social life, as a place of recreation, retail and natural amenity'.

Information about all this appears in a Report presented to the T&E Committee on 5 October. How to pay for and implement the finalised design will be the subject of another report later.



## Briefly

**Broughton History Society** will meet next on Monday 13 Nov at 7.00pm in **Drummond Community High School**. Eric Graham will talk on 'Robert Burns and the Sugar Plantocracy of Ayrshire'.

Lamesley Bridal at **109 Broughton St** has closed. We don't know why.

**Leith Central Community Council** has begun to address the problem of **unrestricted (mostly commuter) parking** from Pilrig St northwards. In line with CEC protocols, they will start with an online survey and a campaign of **knocking on doors** to gauge local opinion. At last month's LCCC meeting, Ward 12 Cllrs Donaldson and McNeese-Mechan were **reluctant to express** personal positions until local sentiment has been accurately assessed.

A **public consultation** concerning demolition of a rear office block at 36 St Andrew Sq and erection of a **music and performing-arts** venue (17/04757/PAN; our website 16.11.16) will be held from **3 to 7.30pm on 7 Nov in Dundas House**. Details of a follow-up consultation TBC.

On 6 Nov at 7pm in **Stockbridge Parish Church** (Saxe-Coburg Pl) Sustainable Communities Stockbridge will meet to discuss the growing problem of **short-term commercial holiday lets**. Spurtleshire-based readers welcome.

A **Service of Remembrance**, organised by the Friends of **Warriston Cemetery**, will be held at the War Memorial in the south-west corner of Warriston Cemetery, led by the Rev Joanne Foster of Inverleith St Serf's Church, at 9.45am on Sun 12 Nov. A full Service will be conducted at ISS Church at 10.50am. **All welcome at either or both.**

Planning permission has been granted to convert a 3-storey basement and attic townhouse at **45 York Place** into 3 one-bedroom flats and 2 studio flats (Ref. 17/0244/LBC). **Historic Environment Scotland's** earlier concerns about the plan's adverse impact on the character of the **Category B-listed building** have been addressed. Officials did not accept **Architectural Heritage Society of Scotland** objections to overdevelopment, subdivision of spaces, loss of plan form and use of aluminium for rooflights.

Closure of the northern pavement and eastbound lane in **E. London St** last month (not to mention hapless signposting) was due to **installation of broadband equipment**.

Royal Bank of Scotland's removal of staff from **Dundas St to Gogarburn** has had a financial impact on local shops and businesses. *Spurtle* hears that **Clark's Bar** is pulling 40 fewer lunchtime pints each weekday, while nearby **Caffeine** is dispensing 300 fewer cups of coffee per week. What with **crossing the road** to make purchases and sprinting to the **loo afterwards**, it's a wonder staff ever found time for ruining the economy.

## Views sought on Calton Hill



Edinburgh World Heritage and CEC seek your views on their draft management plan for Calton Hill.

It's a really interesting and substantial document covering the hill's history, role, significance, uses (including 'anonymous' intimacies), condition, access, objectives for the future, and management structure.

We recommend you read it in conjunction with the online survey [[goo.gl/qrJxy](http://goo.gl/qrJxy)] by 7 November. We agree with many of the plan's aspirations. But we fear there are too few staff and financial resources to carry them all out.

## Now it's cyclists' turn to scratch heads

On 25 October the finishing touches were applied to the latest stage of the Leith Walk upgrade from Pilrig Street to Brunswick Street. For many weeks previous, pedestrians had been confronted by puzzling tarmac strips inserted into the pavement and swerving behind bus stops. With full signing and marking completed, these strips became clearly recognisable on-pavement cycle paths – an unfamiliar feature for many Edinburgh folk.

Cyclists were also faced with the additional novelty of a Two-Stage Right Turn (unique in Scotland and rare outside London) at the McDonald Road junction. This offers a formalised, safer alternative to a nerve-wracking wait in the midst of busy traffic when turning right. However, used as intended, it does involve two phases of green lights to complete, so won't please impatient thrill-seekers and could take some getting used to. For guidance see [[goo.gl/SJ9DeL](http://goo.gl/SJ9DeL)] – it's far from self-explanatory.

(Your Cycling Correspondent feels bound to point out that the same result can be achieved at any right turn by a combination of left turns, U turns and going straight ahead ... when traffic and/or lights permit, of course.)

Sustrans, who suggested this trial to CEC, will monitor its debut, while also giving occasional on-site demonstrations and much-needed advice.—TS



## Homes with many stories

*Local resident Barclay Price has been researching the house histories of 19th-century Albany Street. Here he delves into No 34.*

Many properties in Albany Street that have had commercial use are returning to residential. One is No 34, until recently the Edinburgh Spiritualist Society. Designed by James Gillespie Graham, architect of Moray Place, it was his home from 1817 until 1833.

In 1830 a young man arrived at the door seeking help. Perhaps the man was still dressed in sodden clothes, for he had just escaped drowning when his small boat sank near Leith. Although he had escaped death he had lost everything. He had come to Graham as the architect was the only person he knew living in the city; Graham's reputation was well known to the young man's father, an architectural draughtsman in London.

Graham was happy to assist, and during the mariner's stay the two discussed architecture at great length. Such was the young man's architectural knowledge, Graham advised him to abandon hazardous seafaring and pursue an architectural career instead. As encouragement, Graham gave the young man as he left his brand new pocket compasses, engraved 'James Gillespie Graham, architect, Edinburgh, 1830'. These Augustus Pugin used throughout his sparkling career, including when designing the Palace of Westminster, and he is shown holding them in the portrait of him painted many years later [[goo.gl/cwThsN](http://goo.gl/cwThsN)].

*Spurtle will profile the author online this month, and another Albany Street house history in December. But if you can't wait that long, go straight to Price's comprehensive website at [[goo.gl/5bTUan](http://goo.gl/5bTUan)].*



## Not seeing the wood for the CityTrees

At November's LCCC meeting, the subject of 'CityTrees' arose [goo.gl/w9nrC7]. Glasgow installed some this summer, and now Edinburgh Council is taking a look, too.

They're 'highly visible' vertical structures providing a habitat for moss and lichen. They analyse the environment, and use solar panels to power a self-watering system. They are 275x more effective than real trees at absorbing pollution, and at £10k each are half the price of buying and planting a living specimen.

They're also practical in areas with dense underground infrastructure (pipes to you, chum, and ducts and stuff), and they come with a bench at the bottom.

The only thing wrong with them is – they're not trees. Some community councillors liked them as a pragmatic solution. Others were less impressed: 'Whilst I'm sure they're good at what they do, they manage to look like kitchen appliances gone wrong.'

Whisper it softly ... surely, the best way to tackle poor air quality is to reduce emissions and vehicle numbers in city centres.



Photo: Karen Teichman, Wikimedia, Creative Commons

## Look out for: Swans

Weighing in at over 25lbs, almost 6ft long and with a wing span of 9ft, swans are big. Pristine plumage which can be fluffed out to create a heart-shaped arch over the backs of the males, topped off with an elegant S-shaped neck and a strong black and orange beak complete this most impressive bird.

Known as the Mute Swan, it certainly makes less noise than its migratory cousin the Whooper Swan. However, Mute Swans are far from silent and in flight their powerful wings and specially shaped feathers create a penetrating whistle which is clearly audible over hundreds of metres. Even when at rest they make various grunts and squeaks, and in conflicts with other swans during the breeding season they will issue an unmistakably hostile and intimidating hiss if they feel threatened.

Despite their positive image in literature, music and folklore, and their undoubted elegance, Swans are strongly territorial and can be very aggressive both to humans and other wildlife. Fortunately, at this time of year, a temporary truce is called as the shared challenges of getting through winter leave less energy for disputes. The season of goodwill clearly arrives early on the duck pond. — Miles Forde



Tony Hisgett, Wikimedia, Creative commons.

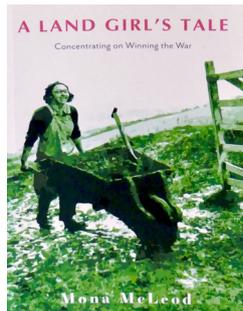
## How women won the war

It is a pleasure to welcome the latest publication of the Scotland Street Press. *A Land Girl's Tale* is Mona McLeod's absorbing memoir of her experience as a Land Girl in Kirkcudbrightshire during the Second World War.

The author dispels any notion that the Women's Land Army operated in some sort of endearing rural idyll. On the contrary, the Land Girls, many from city backgrounds, were often cold and hungry, and were paid risible wages. The rigorous challenges and hardships they faced, and their contribution to 'keeping the home fires burning' and the country fed, should never be forgotten.

Although the Queen officially recognised the WLA's achievements with signed letters, it was not until 2000 that they were invited to lay a wreath at the Cenotaph on Remembrance Day. Their only concrete commemoration is a sculpture near Fochabers, unveiled by Prince Charles in 2012. As Mona McLeod rightly observes, that is 'a deceptively jolly image of life as a Land Girl which this book seeks to correct'. She does so triumphantly.

This is an immensely significant contribution to the annals of Scottish social history. It is also thoroughly readable, and a typically stylish SSP production with delightful illustrations. — JRM [ISBN 978-1-910895-11-5; £9.99]



## RIP Yvonne Pryor (1962–2017)

Yvonne McKenzie Pryor – a feisty local activist well known in these parts – died last month after a tenacious 2-year struggle against cancer.

Born in Buckstone, she worked as a social worker and settled in Broughton in 1991. Here she brought up her family, was for a time Chair of the Claremont & Bellevue Residents Association, and for many years played an active part in the parent-teachers association of St Mary's PS. She had a fierce egalitarian sense of justice, throwing herself behind worthwhile causes at back-green, national and international levels.

Those at her funeral recalled Yvonne's intelligence, wit, sartorial style, and love of music and dancing. The sad occasion was lightened by her request for attendees to wear bright colours, and by the presence in full fig and large numbers of her fellow Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence.

Yvonne Pryor was an ardent spirit and an admirable force for good. She is survived by husband James; children Nuala, Conall, Dillon and Orla; and housemate David. AM

## Briefly

**McDonald Rd Fire Station** is to be refurbished and extended between early 2018 and mid-early 2019. The **Scottish Fire & Rescue Service's** designs have yet to be completed, but **two-storey, temporary prefabricated** accommodation in the existing yard, for SFRS staff and firefighters, is now the subject of planning application Ref. 17/04074/FUL. We regret to report there is no pole.

Budget-short, resource-thin Council officers **struggle with vegetation** growing in and through Edinburgh's hard surfaces. Parks & Green Spaces's new **Integrated Weed Control Programme** will: identify very weedy locations and zone them according to **most appropriate treatment method**; prioritise street repairs; more thoroughly remove growing medium (silt, mulch) in cracks; continue to **reduce herbicide use** in favour of targeted alternatives (e.g. strimming, mulching, removal by hand), and (where appropriate) exercise 'tolerance'.

LCCC has raised doubts about too little space between the new 'floating' bus shelter at **Shrub Place** (due to open soon) and the hoarding round the **construction site** (in place till spring 2018). Developers are also concerned – they reckon the shelter **will block sightlines** from the exit of its new underground car park. **We detect yet another GAJUT**: general absence of joined-up thinking.

It's **onward and upward** for Alien Rock. The company has just been granted planning permission to extend **Alien Bloc** – its current new bouldering centre at 23 Dunedin St (see Issue 265) – to **Unit 2 at No. 25** (Ref. 17/03584/FUL). Work on the additional 300 sq.m of climbing surface began on 1 Nov.

**Broughton-based architect** Richard Murphy's firm has been appointed to convert the former **Lothian Region Council HQ** on George IV Bridge into a new French Consulate and French Institute.

**Tesco at 30–30A Dundas Street** has successfully applied to the Council for the **single-yellow line** outside its shop to be changed to a **double-yellow**. This 'will avoid [delivery] vehicles off-loading outside residential or other business premises and moving loads along the footway'. There will be **no loss of residential parking**, lorries will be required to switch off their engines when stationary, and the expense of the change will be met by Tesco.

Thanks and cheerio to *Spurtle* team member and **Left-Handed Tea Drinker** Rhys Fullerton, who has left Edinburgh for pastures new. We will miss his **exhibition reviews** (any fresh volunteers?) and remain indebted to him for his **research** into the mysterious 'Broughton Whirr' [goo.gl/7BaeJn].

## Moreover ...

What should happen to the old railway line now that the **Powderhall waste transfer station** has closed? Many would like it converted into a **footpath and cycleway**. Not former LCCC chair John Hein, though, who startled members at last month's meeting by calling for the line to be **extended for passenger services** as far as Trinity.

Demolition and clearance of the **old B&Q premises on Warriston Rd** began last month. Canonmills Garden will eventually rise in its place, something **NTBCC welcomes** despite misgivings about the cumulative effect of this and other developments on healthcare and education provision, traffic flow and on-street parking. (See our website 11.12.16.)

The hearing into proposed changes under Phase 5 of the **Leith Walk Improvement Programme** has been sisted until a final decision is made next autumn on whether to **extend the tramlines** to Newhaven.

**Redbraes residents** were outraged in September by the abrupt removal of **play equipment**. They were even crosser last month when a senior Parks official belatedly explained that **corrosion had made the well-used equipment unsafe**, but the department could not afford the **£20k** cost of replacing it. Alternative funding was being sought as a matter of urgency. **Local Gareth Overton** says the money required is 'a trifling sum in the grand scheme', and greatly outweighed by the benefits of outdoor play. He contacted **all four Leith Walk ward councillors** and sat back to await developments. The good news is that CEC has since confirmed to *Spurtle* that funding has indeed been secured from the **North East Locality**, and on 24 October the job was already in the process of being procured.

**Edinburgh Academy** consulted locals on 31 Oct about plans to **expand, reconfigure and upgrade** facilities within its Hamilton Row campus without compromising **listed structures** or their setting. EA 'recognises that this will impact the immediate environs'. **Neighbours** fear for their light, and pleasant views of trees, greenery, old sandstone walls and slate roofs towards a low western skyline.

Two men have been charged in connection with **assault and robbery** of 2 women, one of whom had her handbag and mobile stolen on 22 Oct on Bellevue Rd.

**Spurtle Team:** E. Dickie, J. Dickie, M. Forde, J. Hart, M. Hart, D. Hill, A. McIntosh, J. R. Maclean, S. Michael, M. Orr, L. Rogers, C. Roussot, T. Smith, D. Sterratt, E. Taylor-Smith, D. Young.

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## AM DECORATING

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### LEITH CENTRAL COMMUNITY COUNCIL



A forum for local people who want to engage with and work for their local community.

Participate in local democracy.

Make representations to City of Edinburgh Council, other public bodies and private agencies on everything that matters locally.

Next meeting: 7pm on 27 November  
Nelson Hall, McDonald Rd Library  
[leithcentralcc.co.uk/meeting-dates](http://leithcentralcc.co.uk/meeting-dates)

### Deidre Brock MP Edinburgh North and Leith



Regular Surgeries

**Leith: 1st Friday of the month**  
1-2pm, 166 Great Junction Street  
**Leith Walk: 2nd Friday of the month**  
3.30-4.30pm, McDonald Rd Library  
**Stockbridge: 3rd Friday of the month**  
1-2pm Stockbridge Library  
**Royston/Wardieburn Community Centre:** Last Friday, 4-5pm  
[dbrockmp.scot](http://dbrockmp.scot)  
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## Ben Macpherson MSP

Member of the Scottish Parliament for Edinburgh Northern and Leith Constituency



### Constituency Surgeries

(no appointment necessary)

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28-30 Ferry Road  
Edinburgh  
EH6 4AE

**Every Friday:**  
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Royston/Wardieburn Community Centre  
Pilton Drive North  
Edinburgh  
EH5 1NF

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represents the views of local residents to City of Edinburgh Council.

You're very welcome to attend.

Come along and make a difference at our next meeting  
**7.30pm, 13 November**  
Broughton St Mary's Parish Church, Bellevue Crescent

[www.ntbcc.org.uk](http://www.ntbcc.org.uk)