

# Spurtle



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**BROUGHTON'S INDEPENDENT STIRRER**

**Free**

## WINTER FESTIVAL – THE RECKONING

At its January meeting, the New Town & Broughton Community Council struggled to frame a response to Edinburgh's 2019 Winter Festival.

The loudest and most articulate reactions online and in print have come from those who resent the 'commercial appropriation' of East Princes St Gardens and surrounds. But NTBCC acknowledges there could be a silent majority supporting the conversion of tedious green parkland into a vibrant, colourful fairground/market. No reliable figures exist for either view.

In general, there was support at the meeting for future Winter Festival events, so long as they be transparently organised and more evenly spread at a smaller scale across Edinburgh.

Crucially, NTBCC resolved to focus on procedural failures in how the latest Winter Festival was planned, commissioned, and so poorly administered that it went ahead without planning permission for the second year running.

It also wants to understand how decision making was divided between five Council committees, with elected members on each not knowing the content of relevant decisions made by their peers. Was this fragmentation incompetent or Machiavellian? Who benefited? How can the public trust a commercial contract with Underbelly whose terms we don't see and whose profits are literally none of our business?

NTBCC potentially favours an independent external review, but will first digest CEC Chief Executive Andrew Kerr's report in late January. In the meantime, it will press Council Leader Adam McVey to attend a future NTBCC meeting, and seeks assurances future public consultations by CEC will properly engage ... not float loaded questions and spurious generalisations.

Practically, NTBCC will engage Underbelly's ongoing retrospective planning application in order to re-emphasise its own commitment to due process.

*Spurtle* has regularly attended NTBCC meetings since 2008. Last month's seethed at a controlled boil not witnessed before. Similar sentiments were in evidence at the Cockburn Association's public meeting on 22 January.



## NEW FACES, FRESH IDEAS



Meet Anash 'Tommy' Singh (right), new hand on the tiller at East Claremont Street's Claremont Food and Wine. A Business graduate from Napier University, Tommy has innovative plans including fresh local produce, and organic and gluten-free goods. But he's also keen to hear views from established and prospective customers – let him know in the shop and look out for a questionnaire circulating in the neighbourhood soon. Pictured here with his father and 'financial genius' Satwinder 'Satty' Singh, Tommy took over following Mohammad and Zahida Anjum's well-deserved retiral in December, after 35 years [[bit.ly/2NKutC0](http://bit.ly/2NKutC0)].

## CLOCK NOW TICKING FOR SHORT-TERM LETS

The Scottish Government last month announced that short-term lets in Edinburgh will be subject to a licensing regime from spring 2021.

Further, a new control area may be created in the city, in which planning permission must be sought before establishing STL businesses. Also in the pipeline are tax changes to make STLs contribute fairly to the services they use. The Council and many residents have welcomed the reforms. They want effective solutions to STL-associated anti-social behaviour, rent rises, lack of housing, and hollowed-out communities. They also see the changes as a way to impose safety standards that protect visitors and their neighbours.

Airbnb supports the measures in principle, although the mechanics of the licensing scheme have yet to be worked out, as has the detail of whether local authorities can refuse such businesses permission to operate. In theory, the scheme should be self-financing and flexible enough to match demand.

Ben Macpherson MSP has expressed confidence that the measures will 'tackle community concerns, control the numbers of whole-property short-term lets and generally make the overall housing situation in Edinburgh fairer and more sustainable for all'.

The Edinburgh Northern & Leith constituency is often said to have been particularly impacted by the negative effects of STL expansion. It isn't known how many such unconsented businesses operate in Spurtleshire, but there are 50+ in seven Bellevue streets alone, and locals are regularly woken by a dawn chorus of wheeled suitcases trundling towards the airport.

## TRANSFORMING TRANSPORT

An eight-week public consultation will start this month on the Draft City Mobility Plan (CMP).

The 10-year CMP aims to address Edinburgh's population growth and the global climate emergency by achieving a 'carbon-neutral, inclusive public transport system, with good accessibility and affordability, with better air quality and less congestion, with better spaces for people to move around in and enjoy and a leading global city for people to live, work and access services in and for residents and visitors to enjoy'. And inhale.

Policies to achieve this will address better infrastructure for pedestrians, cyclists, and e-vehicles; and improved air quality. Specifically, these include: extending trams to Granton and to the BioQuarter in Little France; excluding more polluting vehicles from the city centre; integrated public-transport fares; bus-lane prioritisation and greater distances between some stops; planning new developments without cars. Congestion charging remains an option.

The CMP, if approved and then begun later this year, would dovetail with the City Centre Transformation Strategy and other regional and national transport initiatives. It would also run in sync with the new City Plan 2030, as and when that receives Scottish Government approval. Those moved to learn more can start here [[bit.ly/2NwaQxs](http://bit.ly/2NwaQxs)].



## Briefly

The next meeting of the **Broughton History Society** will be on 3 Feb at 7.30pm in Drummond CHS. John Martin will talk about 'Capital Brewing'.

Neighbours are not stepping it gaily in **Gayfield Sq.** They cite quantities of litter, occasionally more dog turds than you can point a stick at, and large areas of unswept leaves where the grass below has **turned to mud.**

Better news from **King George V Park.** In Issue 291 we reported a sudden burst of Council activity after withdrawal of the area's coveted Green Flag. That hard work has paid off, and **Keep Scotland Beautiful** has now rescinded the area's banishment into outermost darkness. Well done to all concerned.

**New Town & Broughton Community Council and Leith Central CC** think differently about current (pre-application) plans for redeveloping the former **Powderhall waste transfer site** (19/04682/PAN; Issue 290). NTBCC broadly welcomes the plans, and the introduction of some private housing within the scheme. It backs those who say the primary school opposite should have principal or exclusive use of the grassed area on part of the **former bowling greens.** LCCC generally favours social over affordable or market-rate housing, and says Leithers must not lose access to any grassed areas. A member of the **Spartleshire awkward squad** notes that the site is not strictly within NTBCC's sphere of operations, and, whilst part of Leith CC's sphere, is not part of Leith.

A **car valeting and hand wash business** will replace 9 spaces in Tesco's basement car park at **7 Broughton Rd.** An independent acoustics report concluded that 'it is likely that the new specific sound sources will have a low impact' on nearby residents (18/09592/FUL). That 'likely' doesn't sound comforting to us.

**Historic Environment Scotland** has drawn the Council's attention to proposed changes to a domestic property at **6 Brandon St** (19/05946/FUL). HES has reservations about the introduction of a highly visible glass balustrade around the roof and a non-traditional horizontal rooflight; removal of a rear boundary wall; and creation of a new internal double-door.

**John Lewis & Partners** seek permission for extensive new and replacement signage on all three sides of their Edinburgh branch (20/00036/ADV). If approved, it would make the building **unmissable from every conceivable angle.** However, still no sign of stone cleaning for the **Brutalist 1973** exterior and continued silence about a rumoured Waitrose outlet.

**Old amber streetlights** in Edinburgh are being upgraded to more energy-efficient, cheaper-to-run, whiter, clearer, more focused alternatives. There will be no excuse for walking into one after dark. Changeovers will take place across **Canonmills and Stockbridge** in Feb/Mar, and across the **City Centre** from Apr-June.

## Awkward business in Council hands

Last month the Quaich Project boasted overwhelming public support for its pre-application consultation on plans to build new bandstand in a re-landscaped West Princes Street Gardens.

The Cockburn Association and four adjacent community councils have fundamental objections, which we summarised here [bit.ly/2TRDlcN]. *Spartle* finds much to admire in the plan, but argues that the Council's management Business Case is key to controlling negative impacts.

That Outline Business Case [bit.ly/2TQCeKq] appeared last month. It is a work in progress. It reflects another work in progress called the Public Spaces Management Plan. Together they are 'expected to maintain the status quo on the number of days given over to major events' here (15 days per year with closure of WPSG for about a week). Some critics already regard that as too much, others trust 'expectations' a lot less than cast-iron assurances.

Establishing the proposed cash-cow Welcome Centre would require a private bill at Holyrood and a legal adjustment to the use of common good land at the Court of Session. Completion of these steps would follow successfully gaining planning consent, and could take a further 2 years. Additional 'public consultation' would then ensue before publication of a Final Business Case.

Coming at the end of the process, the FBC would shape the whole project. That would be no bad thing *IF* elected members had been capable of: accurately canvassing, understanding, and reflecting public opinion; balancing 'nature, reflection, community and performance' without unduly prioritising revenue; navigating the complexity of Council processes and legal contracts; and controlling the manoeuvres of powerful officials. Unfortunately, on these scores, recent experience does not fill us with confidence.



## News anent the buses

Local residents claim as many as 160 Lothian Buses – none of them in service – use East London Street each day, with 'convoys' sometimes forming at around 4.00–4.30am.

They suspect drivers use the street as a convenient short cut as they disperse across the city at the start of the day, or to avoid Leith Walk jams at the end of their shifts.

The setted street is not a designated bus route, so doesn't qualify for additional maintenance, even though it is clearly being damaged. The buses also cause noise and vibration, and produce pollution next to a primary-school playground. New Town & Broughton Community Council is investigating.

In other news, the bus stop newly sited opposite the Scottish National Portrait Gallery (pictured) annoys some people. They say the narrow pavement makes pedestrians and passengers collide (not something we've witnessed here), and claim the six services using the stop (10, 11, 12, 16, 26, 44) often block each other from turning right out of North St Andrew St and then block anything else travelling eastwards along Queen St. They want the stop to be moved before additional traffic travelling to the new St James exacerbates the problems.

In other other news, Bath has recently banned tour coaches from its Grade 1-listed crescents, and is planning to introduce £100 charges for them to enter the city centre's clean-air zone. Officials say the 7-tonne vehicles damage vaulted streets and pavements, and stain buildings with emissions.

Instead, they now aim to attract pedestrian 'cultural' tourists, who tend to stay longer, contribute less to damage, and spend more in the local economy. Edinburgh take note.



## Scenes found, views sought

In the Campaign for Real Ale's recent *Pints of View* (Issue 74), Michael Slaughter and Geoff Brandwood examine 'one of the New Town's great historic pub interiors' at the Barony Bar, 81–85 Broughton Street.

As well as some interesting observations about the bar's previous history of boxed snugs and cubicled off-sales, the article draws attention to 11 Victorian tiled paintings of 'generalised Scottish rural scenes' low down on the northern and eastern walls.

*Spartle* thinks they may be more geographically specific than that. As well as Urquhart Castle, provisionally identified by the authors, we're persuaded we recognise Loch Katrine and Loch Lomond, and have our suspicions about a possible Loch Morlich. Can any reader suggest further locations?



## Genial and generous man with feathered friends

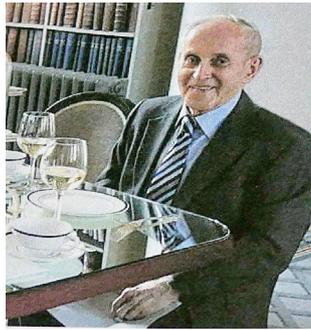
David Smeaton died at the age of 88 on Christmas Eve last year. He was a familiar dapper figure on Broughton Street where he lived, and will be remembered as a genial presence in London Street Grocers where he kept an eye on things, and also enjoyed a rest.

He will also be recalled as the 'pigeon man' who fed peanuts to the birds outside the shop. They became his dotting friends, and were among the shop's 'best customers', according to Raza there.

Originally from Perth, during his National Service in the 1950s, David served in the Royal Army Pay Corps. Thereafter, he worked for Scottish & Newcastle plc as Chief Chartered Accountant, travelling all over the UK. A great aficionado of the theatre, he served as treasurer of Brunton Theatre in Musselburgh and of the much-missed Broughton Village Association.

It was no surprise for this writer to learn that David was a generous supporter of many charities. He was the 'favourite uncle' not just of his family but of many who were lucky enough to know him.

David was a great fan of Laurel and Hardy, and often recalled seeing them at the Glasgow Empire in 1952. At his funeral, the farewell music was the 'Trail of the Lonesome Pine' from the film *Way Out West*. A single man, he is now at peace with his parents in Wellshill Cemetery, Perth.—*JRM*



## Briefly



A rubble wall, cast-iron railings and mature tree are to be removed on land off **Cathedral Lane** (19/05434/LBC). Nuveen Real Estate is creating 2 car-parking spaces here, a vital addition to the 1,600+ parking spaces under its new **St James Centre**. The peculiar back entrance to St Mary's Presbytery at **61 York PI** will remain.

A report on the extension of **Controlled Parking Zones** across Edinburgh, including Leith, will go before the **Transport & Environment Cmte** in Apr. The slight delay is partly to allow **further input from traders** (Issue 291).

Forrest wants to replace its giant LED advertising screen on **Croall PI** with a smaller one. LCCC objects, not least because the current screen has been **operating without consent** since April 2019, and frequently breaches the minimum 15-second image duration which was one of its original conditions. **CEC Enforcement** appears to have been too stretched, feeble, or bedazzled to do anything about it.

The Twitter phenomenon that is **@NewTownFlaneur** appeared only intermittently in 2019. We now have it from an **unimpeachable source** that there will be no reappearance in 2020. The NTF currently rests in a basement somewhere under the **Moray Feus**, a Lochgelly-grown stake through his heart and a grapple of Waitrose organic garlic thrust securely up each snarling nostril. **Red-trews owners** are, for now, safe to roam again.

Ward 11 Cllr **Alasdair Rankin's** no show at January's NTBCC met with fruitless displeasure. Rankin – sometimes **likened to a Snark** due to the difficulty of spotting him – had been on the relevant members' rota to attend but didn't. This irked because, as **Convener of the Finance & Resources Cmte**, with an understanding of the mysterious **Underbelly contract** and the disputed financial benefits of **Edinburgh tourism**, his contribution to the meeting had been eagerly anticipated. NTBCC may need to use more **smiles and soap** to catch him next time.

**Glenn Ross**, proprietor and genius loci of Colours Gallery on **Dundas St** and a long-standing friend of this publication, died on 12 Jan. We will miss his **expert championing** of 19th and 20th-century Scottish art, and his **illuminating aperçus** on those who purchase and exhibit it. Our thoughts are with wife Christine and sons Nicholas and Michael.

## Tourism consultation – too little, too late, too skewed

Late last year, the Council extended its deadline for responses to the Edinburgh Tourism Action Group's Report on Edinburgh tourism (Issue 291). The public's initial response had pretty much flat-lined due to a number of perceived problems.

Based on *Spurtle's* conversations and attendance at meetings across the city centre, these problems included:

- Insufficient public consultation prior to the report being drafted
- Lack of consultation with community and ward councillors
- A sense the report had been crafted by the tourism industry based on its own preconceptions and aspirations
- An untested presumption that tourism growth is desirable, even if better managed than at present
- Blurred conceptual distinctions between heritage, the 'heritage industry', leisure, and mass tourism
- Too little consideration of related implications for transport, housing, the environment, and climate crisis
- A lack of measurable targets
- Unclear mechanisms for public accountability and proper regulation
- Discomfort that a commercially led report was hosted on a public (Council) webpage
- A sense that participating in the consultation would lend the exercise undue credibility.

Based on this and previous rounds of questionable consultation, the draft Edinburgh Tourism Strategy 2030 is due to be published this month.



Edinburgh  
Tourism  
Strategy  
2030

## Local with eye for fine detail and the bigger picture

Colin Alexander Mather ('Alex'), a local fixture of Cumberland Street, died suddenly of natural causes on New Year's Day, while holidaying in Thailand. In life, on a sunny day in an Edinburgh spring or summer, he was almost invariably to be found sitting on a chair outside his front door at No. 22, shooting the breeze with anyone who passed.

Alex was born in 1960 in Kenya, part of an expat family with Edinburgh roots. After a childhood split between boarding school and Commonwealth outposts, he had a career in shipping and project management before returning to Scotland in middle age.

Once here, he devoted a significant part of his time to restoring the architectural features of his New Town flat to their original glory. No effort was spared. Removing 200 years' worth of paint on his cornices with little more than a kettle and a toothpick took some considerable time; then he turned to re-laying the floorboards, which proved similarly labour-intensive.

Once his own home had been dealt with, Alex turned to working out of a grand masterplan for the improvement of Cumberland Street – sadly not yet off the drawing-board. It involved: street lighting; paving; relaying the tarmac; renewing gas, electricity, and water connections; and more.

Alex will be missed – not just by his parents and two sisters, devastated by his early passing – but also by his neighbours and friends in Edinburgh and further afield. Those of us on Cumberland Street will raise a toast in his honour if his projects for us can ever be made to fly.—*Caroline Roussot*



# Moreover ...

A report on design, positions, and phased delivery of **communal bins** across the whole city will go to the **Transport & Environment Cmte** this month. New arrangements could start in early summer.

LCCC has written to the **Electoral Commission** seeking help to unravel why CEC management of community-council elections was so **shambolic** in various parts of the city last autumn.

The Council usually sells the cardboard it collects for recycling at **around £20 per ton**. But that market collapsed in the run-up to Christmas owing to over-supply. This is an **annual phenomenon** known as the Amazon Effect. The UK Govt is currently considering how to make the **packaging industry** pay far more (and more directly) for the waste it creates.

**Gregor Global Ltd** wants planning permission and listed building consent for a 2-storey, 2-bedroom mews house on today's private car park at **10 Dublin St Lane N** (19/05893/FUL). Private applications for planning and listed building consent have been submitted to convert **54 Dublin St** (the former physio and sports clinic) into a 2-bedroom apartment (19/05481/LBC).

**YO! Sushi** plans to open a first-floor branch at the corner of **Princes and Hanover Sts**. Meanwhile, at the corner of **S St Andrew & W Register Sts**, the Nationwide Building Society has designs on the ground floor.

**Picardy Residents Assoc** says officials will seek further public ideas on the final design of Picardy Pl's new central space [bit.ly/2NZWJAu]. **Trees? Loo? Yet another ruddy café?** Any proposed use must presumably be fume-friendly.

**Scottish Gas Network** has carried out remedial work on botched attachments in **Forth St** (Issue 289), and will next start on a remedial redesign of its unsightly governor on **Bellevue Cres** [bit.ly/2TTXBuf].

If case you hadn't heard, Drum's **appeal to the Scottish Govt** against the Council's refusal of planning permission for redevelopment at **Stead's Pl** failed [bit.ly/2TUKokY]. Stand by for a new set of plans from Drum.

A man was seriously injured during an assault by 3 others in **Baxter's Pl** at 3.30am on 14 Jan. Police have asked for information from the public.

Since our last printed issue on 1 Dec, there has been the small matter of a General Election. **Deidre Brock (SNP)** was returned to Parliament for Edinburgh North & Leith with an increased majority. And finally, **following Brexit** on 31 January, we can confirm that Broughton has left the European Union.

**Spartle 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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## Concerts in the Cathedral

6 March: **Aly Bain & Phil Cunningham**  
7 March: **Barbara Dickson (with Nick Holland)**

Tickets £25 online at [eventbrite.co.uk](http://eventbrite.co.uk)

Fundraising concerts for St Mary's Cathedral, Edinburgh. Doors 7pm, Start 7.30pm

## LEITH CENTRAL COMMUNITY COUNCIL

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



Leith Central Community Council

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 Mon. 17 February, McDonald Road Library.**

<https://leithcentralcc.co.uk>



## Deidre Brock MP Edinburgh North & Leith

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### Surgeries

Every first Friday 1-2pm Constituency office 166 Great Junction St	Every third Friday 1-2pm Stockbridge Library
Every second Friday 3.30-4.30pm McDonald Road Library	Every last Friday 4-5pm Royston/Wardieburn Community Centre

**0131 555 7009**

[deidre.brock.mp@parliament.uk](mailto:deidre.brock.mp@parliament.uk)



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## Ben Macpherson MSP

Member of the Scottish Parliament  
for Edinburgh Northern  
and Leith Constituency



### Constituency Surgeries

(no appointment necessary)

**Every Monday:**  
5-6pm at  
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28-30 Ferry Road  
Edinburgh  
EH6 4AE

**Every Friday:**  
4-5pm at  
Royston/Wardieburn Community Centre  
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NEW TOWN &  
BROUGHTON  
COMMUNITY COUNCIL

Representing locals' views  
to City of Edinburgh Council.

You're very welcome to attend.  
Come along and make a  
difference.

Next meeting:  
**10 February at 7.00pm in  
Broughton St Mary's Parish  
Church, Bellevue Crescent**

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