

# Spurtle



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**BROUGHTON'S INDEPENDENT STIRRER** Free

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## SUMMER START FOR 'NEW TOWN QUARTER' BUILDING

If you're wondering why it's taking so long to get going on the 'New Town Quarter' between Dundas St, Eyre Pl, Fettes Row and King George V Park, you're not alone. *Spurtle* approached Ross McNulty of property investment and development company Ediston for answers, and here's what we found out.

The development team now has a construction contract which will allow work to start on the residential-for-sale buildings in July/August this year. They also had a contractor set up to begin on the build-to-rent element in 2023, but the Scottish Govt's intervention on rent-control measures 'effectively put the funding market on hold (not just for our site, this impacted all proposed BTR schemes in Scotland)'.

The team is now waiting for the draft Housing Bill to be released (possibly this month), at which point it should become clear whether investors still see BTR in Scotland as a viable option. *Spurtle* understands from other sources that funders are particularly averse to the prospect of rent-caps not just within tenancies but from one tenancy to another.

'There is obviously a lot more going on behind the scenes,' says McNulty, 'but I can assure you we are working hard to commence development on the site'. For rose-coloured spectacular fly-throughs of the completed scheme and more, visit [[bit.ly/NTQvis](http://bit.ly/NTQvis)].



## CRYSTALS TO SPARKLE ELSEWHERE



After nearly 37 years in practice at 8 Rodney St, husband and wife optometrists David and Dorothy Crystal have retired.

The business now operates as part of the small independent Hakim Group, whose specialists will continue the Crystals' particular expertise in scotopic sensitivity (visual stress) and use of the latest top-spec equipment.

The pair say that, since they opened here on 31 May 1987, the work has changed out of all recognition, even with glasses on. In part, this is due to remote manufacture of lenses, and new roles in NHS community care/emergency responses.

Even more impactful have been advances in technology, progress which has vastly extended the range of diagnoses possible but requires regular professional development to keep abreast of. To this end, Hakim Group has now teamed with Cameron Optometry on St Vincent St.

David and Dorothy have plans for an active retirement. They have shared interests in digital astronomy (they plan to discover aliens and a new planet), gardening, Coltbridge Bowling Club and grandchildren. We wish them every success in all their endeavours.

## MIXED DECISION FOR EYRE PLACE LOCALS

On 8 March, a Scottish Govt reporter dismissed an appeal against Council refusal of planning permission for purpose-built student accommodation (PBSA) at 72-74 Eyre Pl. Some 460 people had opposed the plans.

The Reporter found the proposal's height and massing and position close to the carriageway would overwhelm the sense of intimacy along Eyre Pl Lane. Façade detailing would result in a 'rather uniform feature' (masterly understatement). The overall effect would be 'dominant and overbearing'.

He said plans at the rear would reduce the already limited time sunlight entered communal gardens (behind Eyre Pl and Rodney St (pictured)).

The Reporter said the principle of PBSA on this site is acceptable and found 'some elements' of the design and layout met relevant policy provisions. But overall, he found the proposal did 'not fully accord with the high quality of design and layout sought for new development'.

The New Town & Broughton Community Council credited the result in large part to 'an outstanding community response which shows it's worth getting involved and following due process'. However, it raises questions as to why Planning officials came to such different conclusions to those of elected members and Reporters when they (officials) recommended consenting the proposals.

In a related but separate decision, he was minded to allow the appeal concerning 7 townhouses to the south of the PBSA, (subject to conclusion of a section 75 deal securing financial contributions from the developer for a Broughton High School extension.



## ANTI-SOCIAL FEW WHO BLIGHT BELLEVUE

Police officers are mounting patrols to curb the behaviour of a minority of Drummond CHS pupils causing 'neighbourhood disruption' at break times.

They were called in by residents, retailers and the school because some young people keep littering streets, being 'difficult' with shopkeepers and targeting certain (adult) individuals.

Problems are worst at lunchtimes on Bellevue and Rodney St, and on a circuit of Melgund Ter, E Claremont St, W Annandale St and Bellevue Rd. Packaging, disposable cutlery and uneaten Pot Noodles are often strewn across pavements, usually within a few feet of usable bins.

Littering around schools is nothing new, but in recent years Drummond pupils have shown a marked improvement in disposing of rubbish. That changed for reasons unknown after the Christmas holiday, and it seems local streets are now littered as part of a deliberate provocation or craze.

Mary-Jane Finn has worked in Bellevue since 2014. 'It's frustrating', she says, 'that a few immature youngsters can distract from so much stuff that's really positive about Drummond pupils and the education they get in the heart of this community'.

# Briefly

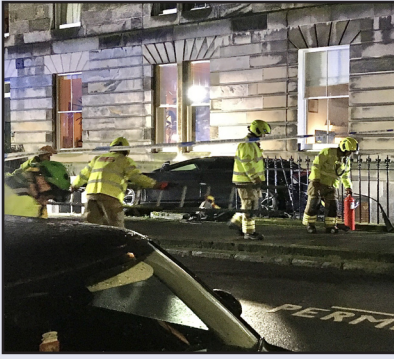


Image: Caroline Roussot

At around 8.30pm on 15 Mar, a black KIA left the road, broke through railings and demolished the steps leading down to a basement short-term let at **17A Cumberland St**. Police and firefighters attended. There were no casualties, and – once a recovery truck had dragged it back onto the street 2 hours later – the **electric vehicle** was driven away. The driver said afterwards that the vehicle had run out of control during a **partially automatised manoeuvre**. Such incidents are vanishingly rare, nothing like this having been seen since an EV taxi driver achieved pretty much the same result on **Forth St** in July 2022 (Issue 320) using nothing but skill and physical coordination.

Black Rock's application to fortify its new office at **20 Brandon St** with a 3m-high fence and gates ([bit.ly/No336p1](https://bit.ly/No336p1)) has been withdrawn.

Rumours are circulating that **Impress Orthodontics** went out of business before it could open new premises at **1–6 Canonmills Bridge**. Flickering signage added to a sense of failure in Mar until it was switched off. Contrary to locals' gum-sucking forebodings, Impress is in full working order. Staff at its London call-centre have told us that while the **Canonmills clinic** had not yet opened it will definitely do so 'at some point' in 2024. They could not or would not say when. This is a busy time for Impress, which already has **outlets around the world** (in France, Germany, Italy, Portugal, Spain, the UK, Ukraine and USA) and last year acquired the London-based **Diamond Whites** invisible aligner brand in a deal worth over £30m.

Repairs to the road-gate below **Calton Hill** mean tour buses, fast-food delivery vehicles and **bone-idle motorists** can no longer access the summit. Blue-badge access is available via the Collective Gallery.

Police are helping Co-op staff to identify unruly youths stealing from the **McDonald Rd** branch. They are also addressing anti-social behaviour (not necessarily by youths) in **Pilrig Park**. As well as normal patrols, they say, this has been added to the **'response patrol matrix'** to maximise police presence. Meanwhile, officers on bikes have been carrying out safety checks outside Taobh na Pairce on **Bonnington Rd**. There are concerns about the number of parents' cars here at school drop-off and pick-up times, and about parking on footways, zig-zag lines and street corners.

Work to repair the mast and time ball on the **Nelson Monument** won't be complete until Oct, but the public will still be allowed back in later this month. Workers will repair exterior stonework via scaffolding, but this should not prevent access (from inside) to the **viewing gallery**. 'In addition, officers are working on updating the heritage offer, improving the visitor experience and increasing footfall/income once the monument works are complete.'

## Constructive talks on responsible construction

Community representatives from across Edinburgh have met officials to discuss ways to reduce inconvenience caused by construction projects in the capital.

Suggestions so far have included calls for the Council to:

- set up a 'clash diary', requiring contractors to reschedule their works if they would coincide with others and create unacceptable conditions
- circulate detailed proposals to affected parties, including contractors' contact details
- enforce timescales, with penalties for projects over-running without good reason
- ensure contactors' pledges (e.g. green travel for workers) are honoured/enforced
- limit number of parking permits per site/firm
- provide design guidance on acceptable style and use of barriers and site boundaries, and enforce their removal afterwards
- enforce repair to damaged paving slabs, roads, landscaping etc.
- insist on better communication and responsiveness by constructors with residents and businesses
- provide a single point of contact within the Council for all construction-related complaints.

An official response is expected later this month



## Pilrig Park not up for grabs

Locals have reacted with scepticism to remarks by Council Leader Cllr Cammy Day concerning Pilrig Park.

In a recent interview with the *Edinburgh Reporter*, he suggested some of the money raised by a future Visitor Levy could be used to improve the area from a community park to a premium park, with Festival events being staged here for part of the year [[bit.ly/PlrgPrk](https://bit.ly/PlrgPrk)].

*Spartle* sought park users' opinions last month. Most were against Cllr Day's suggestion, being unwilling to share Leith's limited green space with seasonal visitors and dubious about whether the soft ground here could withstand increased traffic and footfall.

A few would welcome investment in the park's play equipment, tidiness and perhaps a properly maintained public toilet, but such voices were few and far between.

The tone at last month's meeting of Leith Central Community Council was also sceptical, and it emerged that no ward councillors had been approached on the matter. Caroline Pretty, chair of the Friends of Pilrig Park, said they'd been told since that festivalising the park was not official policy and that before any move to advance the proposal there would be discussion with locals.

For longer coverage, forthright views and some choice language, see [[bit.ly/PPvxpp](https://bit.ly/PPvxpp)].



## More gas than design

In Bellevue Cres car park, plans to install a gas governor, vent stack, solar panel poles and equipment cabinets plus landscaping comprising a raised pedestrian area and cycle bays were approved in Mar, months after some features were installed (23/033994/FUL).

As yet unrealised reconfiguration of the parking area, installation of benches and a cultural heritage information board were approved at the same time. Amusingly, this was on strict condition that work should not begin before completion of archaeological investigation at the site. As far as we are aware, no such investigation has yet taken place.

Gas engineers supposedly made the changes under the mistaken impression that they were exempt from planning regulations, despite operating in a Conservation Area. After finishing the most contentious elements of the project and then recognising the error of their ways, they argued that reworking completed changes would be prohibitively expensive and would disrupt businesses in the St James Qtr.

Planning officials appear to have meekly acquiesced, nodding through what looks to some like the roof of an Albanian military command-bunker because it has 'special regard to the desirability of preserving the siting of the adjacent listed buildings' and their 'special architectural and historic interests'.

Such embarrassing contortions do nothing to comfort those who believe Edinburgh's Planning Dept is woefully under-resourced and occasionally clueless at the moment.



## Locals allege Council negligence

As *Spurtle* went to press, the newly formed Canonmills Owners' & Residents' Assoc was demanding work in Eyre Pl, scheduled to start on 29 Mar, be halted until members' complaints to Edinburgh Council and the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman have been investigated.

We last reported Eyre Place Properties' proposal for 34 new flats in Sept last year (Issue 328). It concerns land adjacent to and including the former Smithies Bar.

CORA alleges inadequate and negligent Council notification of locals about selling public garden ground to a private developer, failure to respect historic usage, and 'destructive and dangerous work activity on site'.

It seeks a formal agreement between owners, residents and Edinburgh Council over future use and ownership of the ground.



## Park improvements in the pipeline

The Council has earmarked £47k for Inverleith Pk in 2024/25. Part of this will be spent on maintenance, part will go towards creating a masterplan for the area.

A consultation with Friends on how to improve play equipment and inclusivity will resume once the design of flood management has been finalised.

Again in 2024/25, £120k realised as part of S75 agreements with the developers of the New Town North Quarter (and, we think, Centrum House) will go towards maintenance and complete refurbishment of play areas in King George V Park.

The Friends will continue being consulted on replacement of the slide (not like-for-like), more inclusive equipment, and a new wheelchair-friendly surface for the toddler enclosure. Work on green space will include better drainage and access arrangements.



## Trees in Leith Walk

*From the Edinburgh Evening Dispatch, (26 September 1888).*

In connection with the notice of motion tabled at the Council meeting yesterday for the planting of trees in Leith Walk, Councillor Paterson has had prepared a table showing the width of the portions of the Walk which it is proposed should be dealt with in this desirable way [Union Pl, Antigua St, Gayfield Sq, Haddington Pl, Leith Walk Station and Middlefield] ....

These figures prove conclusively, what everybody knew, that no possible inconvenience could take place to the traffic by the planting of trees in so spacious a thoroughfare as Leith Walk.

\*\*\*

*From the Scottish Leader (2 October 1888).*

Sir,—In regard to the proposal to plant trees in Leith Walk, it would be interesting to know whether Councillor Paterson was requested by the inhabitants of the district to moot this project, or at whose instigation he is interesting himself in the matter.

If, as your correspondent "T.P." states, trees are a real ornament, and there is plenty of room for them in the Walk, why were the elm trees removed from Elm Row? Was it not because they were a source of danger, dirt, and darkness as described by your other correspondent "Antigua Street?" As a ratepayer, I object to pay rates to enhance the property of "T.P.," and as a shopkeeper, I object to have my premises darkened by trees.

"T.P.'s" advice regarding "elbow grease" savours too much of gratuitous insolence to those who pay to have the streets kept clean to be taken any further notice of.—I am, &c., "Boulevard d'Antigua."

\*\*\*

*From the Scottish Leader (3 October 1888).*

Sir,—Your correspondent "Boulevard d'Antigua" has lost his temper, and talks nonsense. This is a pity.

Let him remember that any changes made must be paid for quite as much by myself as by him.

The matter is one of opinion. I consider that Councillor Paterson's movement would improve the district. Your correspondent thinks otherwise. We will agree to differ.

That concludes my share in this discussion. I am, &c., T.P.



## Briefly



Having lasted barely long enough to cock a leg on the corner of **East London and Broughton Sts**, the Howlin' Hound has disappeared without trace. Owner John Duncan was always pragmatic about the business and appears to have decided that not enough customers was not as good as a feast. Now he's gone and so have his Scottish tapas (Issue 336). Coming soon here is **Thamel**. Named after a bustling area of Kathmandu, it will be a 'cosmopolitan Nepalese kitchen and speakeasy bar', born out of the highly successful **Solti Lounge and Restaurant on Drummond St and Gautam's on Dalziel Pl**. Images and a menu for the latter are here [[bit.ly/NepELSt](https://bit.ly/NepELSt)]. The interior will be designed by Ja!cocol, from whom we have come to expect a vibrant self-confidence with colour.

Coming soon – a new, dedicated email address where the public can report any **Council-owned clock** not showing the right time: [[cceclocks@edinburgh.gov.uk](mailto:cceclocks@edinburgh.gov.uk)].

SAFE's application to add Class 10 (educational) uses to the Class 3 and 4 permissions already allowed at 1 **Gayfield Sq** (23/04307/FUL) has been granted ([bit.ly/No365p2](https://bit.ly/No365p2)). There were 48 objections from local residents, some of whom alleged that **effective management** had transferred from SAFE to another organisation, GTS Solutions. GTS were, objectors said, advertising the premises as suitable for meetings, training, community activities, indoor sports, and pop-up retail/gallery space, for which planning permission had not been applied or granted. Some suspect efforts to achieve an **alcohol licence by stealth** and to operate a late-night bar here. The decision to grant Class 10 status, **but for educational uses only**, may partially allay such fears, as may the restriction of operating hours to 8am–9pm. Officials explained the conditions as intended 'to ensure that the nature of the use of the premises remains compatible with the character of the surrounding area, and that no activities or processes take place which may be detrimental to its amenities'.

LCCC has written to ward councillors and **Transport & Environment Cmte** members in advance of a 'close-down' report this month which will declare the **Trams to Newhaven** project finished. They want answers first to a **list of questions** concerning outstanding defects, design issues, signalling faults and lessons learned: [[bit.ly/CCTTNB](https://bit.ly/CCTTNB)].

The new website for bar and pizza restaurant **One Canon** at 1 **Canonmills** contains an online order form, as you'd expect, but also an interesting potted history of Canonmills to read while you're waiting [[bit.ly/onecanon](https://bit.ly/onecanon)].

**Leith Central Community Council** continues to seek a chair and vice chair to replace the current incumbents this summer. **Training and back-up are on offer**. In another development, they're actively encouraging locals in their 20s to attend LCCC's monthly meetings.

# Moreover ...



Image: Wikimedia Commons.

As the Council strives to (make Edinburgh a **million-tree city by 2030**, Cllr Finlay McFarlane has called for fewer fast-growing **silver birches** to be included in the mix. Their pollen is second only to grass in causing **seasonal allergic rhinitis** (hay fever to you). Silver-birch pollen affects 25% of sufferers, some of whom go on to develop allergies to apples, peaches, cherries, celery and nuts.

Having sampled the most delicious falafel while delivering *Spurtles* on Broughton St, one team member insists on highlighting **Markos Wraps**, now 6 months established in the area. Marko hails **originally from Sudan**, possibly inspiring the shop's colour scheme, and makes his own falafels. In the turbulence of **Broughton's food scene**, savvy locals are sheltering in this quiet café with a fresh lunch.

*Spurtle* has entered the relatively tranquil empyrean of **social-media platform BlueSky**: [spurtle@bsky.social].

Starting in May, the Council will use an **experimental traffic regulation order** to suspend vehicle parking/access at **Elm Row on the third weekend of every month**. A TRO will follow, enabling a new layout for the area with reduced and realigned parking spaces, replacement of the floating bus stop with something less buoyant, a wider footway, a wider 2-way segregated cycle lane and bike parking.

The **Abbotsford Guest House's** application to build a self-contained annexe in the garden of **36 Pilrig St** has triggered 25 objections from locals. Leith Central Community Council's objections included poor architectural cohesion with surrounds, the absence of a design statement (mandatory in a Conservation Area), lack of data on height (required by statute), non-compliant roof and UPVC windows, outlook onto neighbours, use of **Spey St Lane** and adverse impact on bats. They say the application should not have been validated at the outset, and the fact that it was evidences again the poor level of training within the Council's Planning Dept.

Later this year, the Council will trial **reduced mowing frequency** in a bid to improve habitats and biodiversity across Edinburgh. So long as there are no health-and-safety problems (e.g. sight lines at junctions) officials will consider introducing the new regime in **5 site categories**: Conservation Areas (significant for natural conservation), Nature Corridors (alongside roads and watercourses), Residential Flowering Lawn Areas (those not much used), Community Greenspace (e.g. parks), and High Amenity/Recreational Areas (e.g. around sports pitches). Planting of clover, yellow rattle, knapweed, must mallow, field scabious, teasel, meadow cranesbill, cowslip and meadow buttercup will **encourage insect life** and unfastidious lovers.

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Leith Central Community Council

LCCC seeks local people to take key roles as Chair and Vice Chair. Guidance on offer from experienced members. Next meeting at 7pm on 18 April, McDonald Road Library.

<https://leithcentralcc.co.uk>

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