

Spurtle



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BROUGHTON'S INDEPENDENT STIRRER Free

**October
2025**

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NTQ STARTS PDQ

Cabinet Housing Secretary Màiri McAllan (pictured C-L) visited the New Town Qtr site in Sept before work starts here this month on the first 107 homes for families. Welcoming the project, she said, 'My ambition is to increase the delivery of houses, across all tenures, by at least 10%, each year over the first 3 years of the next Parliament.'



Ediston's Development Director Ross McNulty (C-R) expects a Council determination on planning consent for residential and 'best-in-class' purpose-built student accommodation (25/01899/FUL) elements of the overall plan by the end of 2025 (Issue 352). Out of 369 comments submitted to the Council about these by the deadline of 18 July, 366 were objections.

Commenting after the Cabinet Secretary's visit, McNulty referred to slow progress on the project caused by COVID-19 and construction-industry disruption. 'We would like to place on record our appreciation for the patience of local residents who have admirably coped with the delays.'

NEW COCKBURN DIRECTOR



Rowan Brown began as Director of the Cockburn Assoc conservation watchdog on 24 Sept. Her professional experience includes periods as Chief Executive Arts Leadership at Michigan University and Harvard Business School, Senior Curator at the National Museums of Scotland, Director of the National Mining Museum Scotland and Chief Executive Officer of Museums Northumberland. Dr Lesley Martin, Chair of the Cockburn Trustees, says Brown brings 'just the right blend of business acumen, a deep knowledge of heritage, commitment to sustainable and inclusive principles, and an impressive track record of delivery.' Brown fills shoes vacated by Terry Levinthal, who now steps in as Director of Edinburgh World Heritage (Issue 353).

DIM VIEWS OF NEW LOOS

Council workers installed 3 portaloos beside the National Monument in early Sept after facilities at the Nelson Monument and Collective Gallery were overused by non-patrons. Observers – including Edinburgh World Heritage and the Cockburn Association – immediately criticised the siting as crass and disrespectful.

The Collective Gallery was unhappy at subsequent calls for the toilets to be repositioned in the car park, and instead 4 were positioned on alternative hard standing at the end of Regent Walk. There is now talk of more substantial temporary cabin-toilets, which many locals find equally objectionable on aesthetic grounds and likely to attract vandalism and other anti-social behaviour.

Edinburgh Council excluded the Calton Hill Conservation Trust from these decisions, which is unfortunate given the latter's valuable improvements here and its importance as a counterbalance to commercial interests on the hill.

CHCT was left in the dark again when organisers decided to return the 31 Oct Samhuinn Fire Festival here from Holyrood Park. Concerned observers seek clarification on how the event (expected to attract c.5,000 attendees) will be ticketed and marshalled, how many Council officials will supervise, and where the bonfire will be positioned.

Questions also surround what (if any) level of Parks Levy (Issue 347) the Beltane Fire Society will pay for the event, and whether it must deposit a reinstatement bond to cover potential damage and clean-up costs.

In unrelated related news, CHCT has declared an 'erosion emergency' and called on the Council to rebank, returf and reseed areas of the hill where footfall, overcutting, dry weather and lack of irrigation have created dustbowls [bit.ly/bogsndust].



REPRIEVE FOR AT-RISK STAFFORD CENTRE

The funding cut threatening Broughton Street's mental-health charity the Stafford Centre (SC) has been lifted for now (Issue 353).

On 26 Aug, the Edinburgh Integration Joint Board reduced the extent of its proposed financial cuts to third-sector health and social-care services in the city by £1.26m a year. While £94k will still be cut from several other charities, the SC is among a select few which will now enter an efficiency-driven 'recommissioning process' lasting up to 18 months.

Change Health's CEO Nick Ward had all along argued that cuts to preventative care, like that offered by the SC, would end up costing the city more money in the long run.

He will now spearhead an evidence-led, fiscally responsible and clinically sound redesign of SC services. However, there are no guarantees EIJB's response will be enough to guarantee the resource's survival.

EIJB's chair Katharina Kasper says cuts are inevitable because the funds available for it to distribute are impossibly stretched.

Ward applauds the EIJB's temporary change of policy but says trust must be rebuilt. He says there needs to be full transparency and a genuine dedication to working with the third sector by the EIJB, as well as a commitment to the principles of community-based early intervention and preventative approaches.

'We're here to work closely with them, along with our partners, to ensure that we can truly meet the needs of our communities.'

Briefly



The charity **Outer Spaces** has taken a temporary lease on the vacant Cube office building at **45 Leith St**, allowing artists to operate studios and project-spaces here for free. Tours are sometimes available by prior arrangement, but **intriguing glimpses** of work in progress are always visible from the steps between **Greenside Row** and **Calton Hill**.

A late-hours licence application for Piri Piri Chicken at **38 Elm Row** has ruffled residents' feathers. They (and Leith Central Community Council) oppose plans to operate Sun–Thurs, 11pm–1am and Fri–Sat, 11pm–2am.

To mark **150 years** of defending the interests of the capital and its residents, the **Cockburn Assoc** has published *Campaigning for Edinburgh*. The book examines the **economic and developmental contexts** of each era, and the CA's efforts to engage residents and provide a positive vision. For a full review, **see our website** (1 Oct).

In the trial scheme's first roll-out, Spurtleshire locations for taking and leaving **Voi e-bikes-for-hire** are: Hopetoun Cres/McDonald Rd, Hopetoun St/Annandale St, NE St Andrew Sq, foot of Scotland and Dundas Sts, Logie Grn Rd/Powderhall Rd, Regent Rd, and behind the OMNi.

Members of the **Education, Children & Families Cmte** last month voted to restrict mobile phone use in Edinburgh primary-school classrooms and move towards doing the same in secondaries pending an **Integrated Impact Assessment** and reckoning of costs. Some observers suggest better focus, behaviour, outcomes and well-being might also result from a ban on mobile phones in **City Chambers**.

The short strip of former woodland beside **Blenheim Pl**, on the market with planning permission at over £880k (Issue 351), is now under offer.

The Council is considering new public-toilet provision in Edinburgh 'town centres'. **McDonald Rd Library** and **165a Leith Walk** have potential.

The curved boundary wall between **Warriston Cres** and adjacent playing fields has been struck 3 times since 2023, and large delivery vehicles struggle manoeuvring here on a daily basis. In response, and despite **strenuous local objections**, 3 residential parking bays will be removed.

Açai Bros Health Bar has opened at **10 Rodney St**, offering various berry-based bowls and smoothies, plus bagels and wraps. The (unconnected) **Mana Poké** shut abruptly here in the spring, to the surprise of customers and staff.

Residents of **81–91 E London St** plan security gates for their car park areas after multiple instances of strangers': intimidating behaviour; unauthorised parking; vandalism, littering and dumping; boozing and drug taking; dog fouling; rough sleeping; thefts and break-ins; unruly youth.

Cold comfort on Broughton Street

The latest replication of artist Timothy Schmalz's *Jesus the Homeless* appeared on Broughton St outside St Mary's RC Cathedral early last month.

Its position here is better than that originally proposed on Little King St which would have been inconspicuous and involved the loss of one or more trees (Issue 342).

We admire the sculptor's humane and compassionate intent. Paradoxically, however, on this bronze bench with a bronze Christ under a bronze blanket there is no room for a real person to recline.



Moratorium stopped in its tracks

Planning Cmte members have shied away from declaring a moratorium on new purpose-built student accommodation in Edinburgh. Cllr Aston's motion in June calling for clarification of the issues prompted the report which informed this decision.



At last month's meeting, officials advised that any such supplementary guidance to the process which determines housing use, as set out in the Local Development Plan, would face a significant risk of hard-to-defend challenges in court by developers. Amending the current LDP would be time-consuming, resource-intensive and legally uncertain.

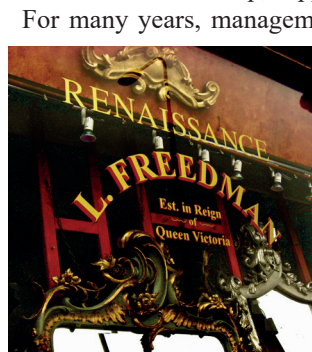
Existing policies already allow management of PBSA applications on sites not specifically allocated for this purpose. City Plan 2030 contains provisions for 'convertibility' from PBSA to mainstream housing.

The capital needs additional student accommodation, but should new evidence later suggest a long-term decline in student numbers or some other change in demand, appropriate policies could be adopted in Edinburgh's City Plan 2040, on which work has begun. In the meantime it is important, said officials, to retain flexibility.

In answer to recent questions by Cllrs Aston and Caldwell (Ward 12), it emerges that there are currently 11 PBSA applications in progress across Edinburgh. Since 2020, 9 Council refusals of PBSA applications have been successfully appealed and upheld by the Scottish Govt.

Renaissance – time to reflect

We regret the passing of L. Freedman's Renaissance, the Antigua St institution founded in 1890. The family shop, celebrated for its picture and mirror frames hand-crafted in the backroom workshop, supplied individuals, businesses and galleries across the UK.



For many years, management refused to be interviewed by us for fear of drawing attention to certain antique and hugely valuable items of stock. How anyone except staff could have located them amid the ceiling-high mountains of mouldings, mat boards and backings is a mystery. In our experience, it was hard enough just finding the way out.

Mr Freedman it was who attached occasional philosophical musings and unpredictable opening hours to the front door at No. 8 (see our website 1 Oct) and a model vixen to the roof in 2015 (Issue 280). The premises' owner now proposes a restaurant here.

Possibly, sometime, somewhere ...

In a supplementary question at Aug's full Council meeting, Cllr Osler (Ward 5) sought help to address the chronic and increasing issue of campervans parked overnight, for free, on Fettes Av.

Transport & Environment Convener Cllr Jenkinson replied that he 'found this question quite interesting' and was 'certainly interested to explore what the art of the possible is with officers'.

He acknowledged the existence in the city of 'a lot of visitors, some temporary and some not so much' and of 'a number of vehicles on our streets longer than we would often expect'. He undertook to 'take that away' and see what could be done in 'pushing this forward'.

He has a gift for not overburdening his answers with detail.



Student beds for bingo hall and no housey-housey

The Development Management Sub-Cmte last month voted 6:5 to approve conversion of the former Mecca Bingo Hall at 26 Manderston St into purpose-built student accommodation with 200 beds (24/01162/FUL). There were 35 objections to the scheme, one of them from Leith Central Community Council.



Ward councillors complimented developer Longstone and its architect on a 'balanced', 'high-quality' and 'creative' proposal, given conflicting Council requirements for the site.

Cllr Mowat (Ward 11) moved approval in line with officers' recommendations, but with extra conditions applied to water handling, biodiversity and a contribution to the City Car Club.

Cllr Osler (Ward 5) and Cllr McNeese-Mechan (Ward 12) urged refusal, mostly because approval would mean failure to meet the Halmyre St Place Brief target for

mainstream and/or affordable residential accommodation in the overall development site. They had doubts also about easy accessibility to educational destinations, sufficient daylight and amenity, and adverse impact on the established character of the area.

Observers note an unintended consequence of locals having pressed for the Bingo Hall to be (as they hoped) 'protected' by inclusion within the Leith Conservation Area in 2022 (Issues 316, 319). The old structure's floorplates make it unsuitable or expensive for conversion to conventional housing, and no alternative to PBSA attractive to the community (e.g. leisure uses) has attracted commercial interest.

Cllr McNeese-Mechan now calls for clearer housing priorities to be established earlier in the drafting of future Edinburgh place briefs.

Temporary 'improvements' made permanent

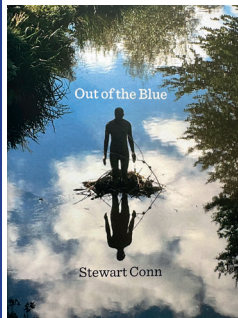
In Aug, the Traffic Regulation Order Sub-Cmte delayed deciding whether to make permanent Experimental TRO traffic-safety changes to the city's East Area (Issue 354). At Sept's follow-up, officials gave more detail on costs, budgets, materials and prioritising upgrades. Councillors then finally agreed to proceed with these and other 'improvements' to the North Area (Canonmills–Picardy Pl), despite New Town Broughton Community Council objections (Issue 344).

Spurtle has heard various discontents about this process since May, including frustration at officers' alleged 'misrepresentation' of NTBCC's points and too little opportunity for it to respond. It may complain to the Public Services Commissioner.

Officials were themselves annoyed at having to provide additional information to elected members at short notice about things which weren't strictly relevant, to a schedule which threatened derailing the whole project.

In this context, we enjoyed the improving chill of an in-person contribution by Deborah Paton, Head of Transport Strategy & Partnerships ([bit.ly/TROcom925], 32:00). Polite but frosty, she reclarified the 'context and crucially the intent' of the programme, repeated the fact that (while interesting) possible materials to be used were *not* the subject of the decision within the TRO, and reminded councillors of the inescapable reality that Council choices must abide by the *Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984*.

The dark brine seeping in



Stewart Conn's new collection *Out of the Blue* straddles multiple elements: earth, water, sky, local, national, youth and old age, past and present, what endures and what is lost. There is astonishing focal depth to these 25 poems, conveying complex experiences with wonderful economy.

Spurtle readers will recognise many of the framing contexts of his New Town interiors, park and garden, a familiar cherry tree, the Beaverbank Gormley. But Conn also partially inhabits these as an outsider rooted in rural childhood memories, his Ayrshire otherness and mistrust of Edinburgh, the new reality of a parent whose assumptions have been shaken by untimely death.

Love consoles and inspires, comes out of the blue without explanation. Consoling too is the sad realisation that the 'unbridgeable gulf between one generation and another' – and that private drifting 'into illness and towards the unknown' – was shared, unspoken, by loved generations before.

Is love enough? Perhaps, for a while, it harmonises head and heart. But it cannot halt the unstoppable. Nothing mutes the sound of buffalo behind the curtain 'pawing and snorting towards us, filling our/living-space with an awesome drumming'.—*A. McIntosh*

Stewart Conn, Out of the Blue, Mariscat Press, ISBN 9781 0686756 6 9, £9.00

Briefly



Canonmills Owners' Residents Assoc is taking grievances about the Council's sale and disposal of former garden land backing onto **Eyre Pl** to the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (Issue 338, p.3).

A man o' pairs, Edinburgh Northern & Leith MSP **Ben Macpherson** has been appointed **Minister for Higher & Further Education**. Since his election in 2016, he has served variously as Minister for: Europe, Migration & International Development (2018); Public Finance & Migration (2020); Rural Affairs & the Natural Environment (2020); and Social Security & Local Government (2021–23).

Since its launch in Apr, Police Scotland's new **Retail Crime Taskforce** has made 70+ arrests relating to 500 charges for offences in the **city centre**, including assault, possession of weapons, shoplifting and breaches of the peace. Part-funded by Essential Edinburgh, the unit has recovered around **£50k of stolen property**. More problematically, on Fri and Sat evenings, 6–8 officers struggle to contain groups of 100–200 young people (some of them bent on mischief) around **Waverley Mall, S St Andrew St** and **Calton Hill**.

The funeral took place at Warriston Crematorium, last month, of **Selwyn Johnson**, who died on 25 Aug, aged 77, after a 17-year battle with Parkinson's Disease. A **Bellevue Rd** resident for 48 years, he formerly ran the Anaesthetic Technicians Dept at the **Royal Infirmary**. He is survived by his wife Janice, children and grandchildren.

The charitable **Wolfson Foundation** has smiled on 2 Edinburgh ventures in its latest funding for research and education projects. The **Royal High School Preservation Trust** received £500k towards creating a National Centre for Music on Regent Rd. A £100k grant will help realise the **Dunard Centre's** vision for a new and inclusive concert hall in the scheuch of **St Andrew Sq**. Congratulations to both.

The Council has refused permission to demolish a 'dilapidated' C-listed mews building at **9 Montgomery St Lane** and replace it, using salvaged stone, to create 2 self-contained short-term-let holiday apartments. Elsewhere, despite 13 objections, permission has been granted to convert the office at **58 Albany St** into a hotel (Issue 352).

The owners of A-listed **16 Heriot Row** (an Austrian real-estate company) plan to install a **new street lantern** here matching the one next door (*not* the one lit by Leerie outside the former Stevenson home). No. 16 has been occupied by solicitors **A. & W.M. Urquhart** since 1934.

Charlie Ellis has favourably reviewed Santu's new 'shrine to speciality coffee' on **Union St** here [bit.ly/flofbns].

The next meeting of the **Broughton History Society** is on 6 Oct at 6.30pm in McDonald Rd Library. Andy Arthur will talk on **'Bellevue House and the Surrounding Area'**.

The Rotonda café/deli at **23c Dundas St** closed on 18 Sept after 3 years in business. New owners of the property think that, for their purposes, in the round, it would **make a better office** with additional loo, kitchenette and double-glazing (25/034216/FUL).

Moreover ...



Do you see **Picardy PI** as an urban symphony of autumn browns, fawns and yellows? Or as a desiccated wilderness full of dead weeds, dead trees and tangled litter? The lack of water here, civic pride and Council maintenance dismay many. **New Town & Broughton CC** is investigating whether nearby businesses might donate money and/or **volunteering hours** towards improving the area.

In **Issue 353** we reported the Council's refusal of planning permission for a 20m telecom monopole above **Logie Grn Rd.** Officers said it would spoil visual amenity and put trees within a **Nature Conservancy Site** at risk. The applicant Freshwave Facilities is now appealing against the decision on a **technicality**: it says the Council failed to 'notify them in writing of their determination as to whether prior approval is required within 56 days'. A decision is expected by 20 Oct.

A report to the **Planning Cmte** last month called on the Council to continue temporarily subsidising **bus routes for new developments** from the moment of first occupation until demand builds. In a felicitous phrase, the **Edinburgh Bus Users Group's** written deputation pushed for 'muscular implementation' of this provision.

New Town & Broughton Community Council seeks locals' views on **black spots** for: dog fouling, fly-tipping, graffiti/stickers/gum, litter, blocked gullies and overabundant weeds (Issue 352). It's part of an effort to ensure the Council's '**Pride in Our City**' project is responsive and well targeted. Some **doubt it is either** [bit.ly/EHhtspt].

Culture & Communities Convener **Cllr Margaret Graham (Ward 11)** has recently agreed in public with the assertion of Cllr Osler (Ward 5) that it's worth spending money to replace damaged Fitness Trail equipment in **Inverleith Park**.

Edinburgh Picardy PI Ltd plans to turn the B-listed, multi-storey, former premises of Hertz car rental at **10 Picardy PI** (next to Tesco) into a 50-bdrm hotel. Latest proposals slightly revise ones which the Council approved in June 2024 (23/01789/FUL).

Some **KGv Park** trees will be pruned to allow sheet piling on the adjacent building site (25/04162/TCO). This will 'ensure future health and growth'.

The Transport & Environment Cmte has fudged defining '**high pedestrian flow**' on city footways (where 3m clearance is required before allowing tables and chairs outside). It says there's insufficient data and no budget to gather it. Officers will instead decide on a **case-by-case basis**, allowing plenty of room for interpretation, upsets and catterbatter.

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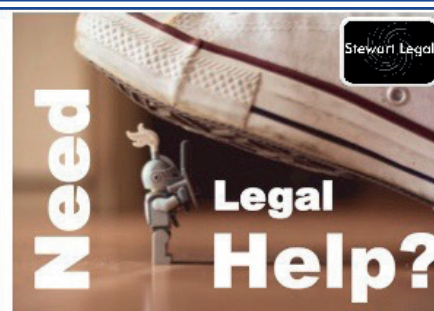
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