

Spurtle



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BROUGHTON'S INDEPENDENT STIRRER Free

**September
2026**

No 365

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EXCEPTIONAL RESPONSE MUST STAY EXCEPTIONAL



In Issue 364 we voiced misgivings that Fringe venues displaced from George St after the Princes St fire could damage trees when relocated at short notice to St Andrew Sq.

City Centre councillors Miller, Mowat and McFarlane raised similar concerns with officials.

We're glad to report that when the grass-mounted Bijou and road-mounted Front Room were erected, they did indeed avoid trunks, boughs and root systems.

However, they did so without planning permission.

The reason for this lack was that, given the case's 'very particular circumstances', the lead Planning officer decided any enforcement would be 'inappropriate in this instance' and so did not demand planning consent.

Instead, the promoter Assembly Festival worked closely with an arboriculturalist to survey current growth and ground conditions to ensure layouts which would not cause harm during construction, use and take-down. Officials monitored the situation throughout.

This exceptional response appears to have worked. Nevertheless, the danger is that exceptional circumstances may become normalised in future. As evidenced by the Council's recent stance on the Spiegeltent (Issue 362), there is no substitute for an orderly and timely planning process in St Andrew Sq Gdns.

COUNCIL HEEDS CALL FOR PLAYGROUND UPGRADE

In response to a 447-signature community petition about Inverleith Park play facilities, councillors on the Culture & Communities Cmte last month agreed to request a report on the issues raised.

These included calls for the Council to:

- repair or replace broken and unsafe equipment
- commit to a fully funded improvement plan
- ensure inclusive provision for children of all abilities
- consult meaningfully with the local community
- set a clear timeline for delivery.

Petitioners reminded councillors that both local primary schools lack adequate playground space and play facilities and asserted that the Council has a statutory duty to ensure children have

access to safe, stimulating and adequate play opportunities.

So far, Friends and over 40 groups and individuals have demonstrated local demand for an upgrade by raising £6.7k of the £300k they estimate it would cost for a 'complete makeover and new equipment'.



THRONGS FOLLOW ENTICING PONGS



Image: The Big Cheese.

**Big Cheese Team L-R: Mia Cowie,
Neil Cunningham, Aidan McKinlay.**

The Big Cheese has enjoyed successful opening weeks, bringing to Broughton St a carefully selected range of luxury cheeses, wines and crackers.

Owner Neil Cunningham has opted to showcase this collection gallery-style in £5k-a-piece eco-friendly fridges alongside a quartz-topped 'cheese board' for cutting and admiring your selection. A 'cheese studio' maturing in the back is set to host private tastings for events.

Early footfall suggests the new independent artisan establishment has received a warm welcome. Local enthusiasts and those simply curious to know what a £5k eco-friendly fridge looks like are as happy as can brie.

—HM

The original Boaty McBoatface?

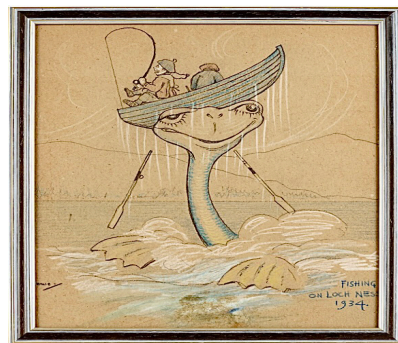


Image: Courtesy of Lyon & Turnbull

'Fishing on Loch Ness' (coloured crayon on buff paper) by Jamie was expected to fetch between £250 and £350 at Lyon & Turnbull's *Scotland Collected* auction on 19 Aug. It's dated 1934, the same year in which Arthur Grant first described the creature as resembling a seal-plesiosaur cross and London gynaecologist Dr Robert Wilson apparently captured it on film. In 1975, the artist and naturalist Sir Peter Scott proposed naming the creature *Nessiteras rhombopteryx* ('Ness inhabitant with diamond-shaped fin'), which coincidentally works as an anagram of 'monster hoax by Sir Peter S'.

FIRST STEPS ON UNSAFE FOOTBRIDGE

As we went to press, Council officers were still unable to say when the Powderhall Footbridge, closed in June due to fears of structural failure, would be repaired or replaced (Issues 363–64).

Officials are assessing technical issues and their cost implications and will not yet offer next steps or a timeline. Cllr Caldwell has requested such information by Dec's Culture & Communities Cmte meeting and asked where any additional funding will come from if required.

An officer has separately acknowledged: 'Whether it is feasible to consider a temporary crossing would need to be factored into decisions alongside the cost of the works to repair or replace the bridge.'

Leith Central Community Council calls on the Council to urgently accelerate reopening, if needs be by applying ugly but effective temporary reinforcement.

Briefly



Members of the **Edinburgh Photographic Meetup Group** will show diverse examples of their work in a free exhibition later this month and next. It runs (10am–4pm) on 26–27 Sept and 3–4 Oct at **68 Great King St**. The image above is by Charlie Keddie.

Lannan Bakery, the Instagrammable pastry sensation on **Henderson Row**, is advising flaky customers not to scoff their products while sitting on other people's private steps and benches in nearby streets. **Their helpful new map**, stapled to bags and showing more suitable spots and the location of bins, now litters footways across **Stockbridge**.

Edward Tissiman, writing on Bluesky [[bit.ly/EdTsBsk](https://bsky.net/profile/EdTsBsk)], noted that a record 2,583 cyclists used the **Leith Walk** bike lane at the OMNi on 22 July. He ascribes this to the success of Voi hire e-bikes.

Officials recommend consenting redevelopment of offices as an apart-hotel at **16–26 Forth St** (Issues 360–61). However, after representations from 3 ward councillors, **Development Management Subcmte** members last month voted to continue deliberations with a site visit and hearing. This risks allowing the developer to press for consent from the Scottish Govt on grounds of **non-determination within the legal timeframe**.

Aaron Strachan (21), who raped a teenage girl in a **York Pl** basement in May last year, was jailed for at least 5 years at the end of July. Imposition of a **lifelong restriction order** means he will not be released unless a parole board considers he no longer poses a threat to the public. Det. Insp. Gillian Wells from Edinburgh's **Sex Offending Policing Unit** said: 'Police Scotland remains committed to tackling sexual crimes and bringing those responsible to justice. We'll thoroughly investigate and have specially trained officers and partner agencies to support [victims] throughout.'

A local resident has reported cracked paving on **Dundas St** between Gt King St and Fettes Row. He says the section was reconstructed in 2023, but less than 3 years later some of the slabs are already breaking again. He says he's asked the Council to **investigate the original works** 'before taxpayers get the privilege of paying for them twice'. A different local resident remarks that individual slabs have cracked and been replaced **at least twice before** but denies that they cause any kind of hazard. In any case, local bears waiting for children will be pleased.

There will be motion but no traffic on the southern lane of **Waterloo Pl** (Calton Hill–Leith St) during Scottish Water's £3m sewerage upgrade from 7 Sept to 23 Nov.

Community councils work on City Plan 2040

At its Aug meeting, New Town & Broughton Community Council and members of the public aired ideas for possible inclusion in Edinburgh's City Plan 2040.

That Plan will shape guidelines for the capital's planning from 2030 to 2040 and earmark uses for potential development sites.

Policies discussed included:

- formalising aspects for conservation, e.g. the mix of small businesses and homes in the city centre
- preserving ground-level green spaces and creating new ones
- mitigating effects of climate, e.g. thermal insulation, wider introduction of shade-providing trees
- maintaining balance by protecting the city against saturation of uses, e.g. apart-hotels, nail bars, cafés, and trends currently unforeseen
- clearer and more consistent assessment of need for current and future activities
- a more effective presumption against irreversible development, e.g. student accommodation that cannot be used later for mainstream housing.

There are comparatively few undeveloped sites in NTBCC's area, but those worth monitoring include parts of: Gayfield Sq, McDonald Pl, Eyre Pl, Greenside End, Annandale St, E London St and Broughton Market. There was at least one aspiration to keep Broughton Market in commercial rather than residential use.

A vision for Leith

Leith Central Community Council's notes and aspirations will be submitted in addition to a Local Place Plan shared with Leith Harbour & Newhaven CC and Leith Links CC. The latter is available in draft form at [bit.ly/LPPlan]. Eye-catching recommendations include:



- a halt to more hotels, short-term lets and student accommodation which have overstretched local services and worsened the housing shortage, particularly for local people on low incomes.
- reduction of negative impacts of Houses of Multiple Occupancy
- greater provision of community-owned energy
- protection and facilitation of light-industrial premises as good neighbours for residents
- increased job opportunities, particularly for young people
- continued support and improvement of public transport
- redesign of unsafe and unjust features of the Leith Walk cycle lanes and removal of unfair restrictions on car use
- increased planting, including trees, on major streets, and their effective maintenance
- improved biodiversity and continuous improvement of Water of Leith water quality
- reduction and better management of rubbish and litter
- meaningful solutions to Seafield stinks
- making local democracy more accountable and transparent.

Members of the public acting under their own steam are also invited to contribute ideas. You have until 30 Sept to do so here [bit.ly/CP2040con].

CCG enters school's good books

CCG (Scotland), the contractor building intergenerational housing on the former bowling greens beside Broughton Rd, is spending £7,500 on improvements to the grounds of Broughton Primary School.

Elements of this hearts-and-minds charm offensive include hedging, playground road markings (cycling proficiency), installation of polytunnels and 50 hours' volunteering in the new academic year.

Pupils from this and other local schools can participate in 13 planned site-based work placements. In Aug, CCG will appoint 1 trade apprentice from the local area.

As for construction progress, work on the roof and external finishes started last month. Improvements on and around St Mark's Path will be brought forward while it is unused due to closure of the Powderhall Footbridge.

If you have questions or concerns about site operations here, contact site manager Ross Greer at rgreer@c-c-g.



More pointless signage

Frustrated readers continue to contact us about redundant signage (Issues 363–64). On Bluesky, Clu*ter *uck complains about directions to new developments which linger long after the properties have been sold. 'The city is littered with this kind of thing. Should developers not at least have a statute of limitations (i.e. before it's knocked down again)?' This example, courtesy of Westpoint Homes, has been in place since 2016.

Harald Tobermann offers a bus stop-mounted roadworks warning on Dalmeny St. It was installed before work to fix drains and sewerage took place in 2023. It's still there, perhaps in anticipation of more problems further down the line.



Managing streets and civic spaces

Under plans brought forward last month by Corporate Director of Place Gareth Barwell, officials, elected members and stakeholders will develop 'Management Rules for Streets and Civic Spaces'.

These will help regulate the presence and conduct of people on public land engaged in, for example, busking, street trading and advertised tours. Green councillors led successful objections to restrictions on street begging and stationary political protests.

Excessive amplification, traders' footway clutter, obstructive tour-parties, advertising, defacement of surfaces, repetitive shouting and damage to historic monuments are some of the issues to be addressed.

Prior permission through 'an appropriate approvals process' will be required after payment of a reasonable fee, and some activities may require public liability insurance, risk assessments and signed adherence to a code of conduct.

Rules are expected to be implemented early next year. They will, in the first instance, be enforced by Council 'street ambassadors' (paid for out of the Visitor Levy), if necessary with the support of police.



Levy 'unfair' to small businesses

One month after the start of Edinburgh's Visitor Levy, commercial providers of accommodation are complaining that the new tax is unfair.

They say it imposes excessive financial and administrative burdens on them and favours unregistered short-term-let opportunists in an already thriving black market.

The Levy charges a 5% fee on top of the initial booking price for up to 5 consecutive days. That sum counts as part of taxable turnover, and so for some accommodation providers is subject to VAT. It is an additional cost, and for those just over the VAT threshold can seem disproportionately harsh.

Legitimate operators are responsible for gathering the Levy, paying it to the Council, and keeping records for the following 5 years. Unregistered operators (already trading without regulation, safety checks, or the cost of adequate insurance) can claim to charge customers the 5% Levy while actually pocketing it.

Spurtle welcomes Edinburgh's Visitor Levy and looks forward to the beneficial effects of the (conservatively estimated) £57m it will raise. Some observers argue that some of it should be spent on improved regulation of the black-market self-catering sector, but our understanding is that enforcement is covered by existing licence fees.

Beware of bleats

A scholarly but accessible article by regular *Spurtle* contributor Charlie Ellis appears in the journal *Scottish Affairs* (2026: 35.3). It explores how online communities discuss the history and contemporary condition of Scotland's urban places. His conclusions are disturbing.

Ellis focuses on 'sites of nostalgic, "declinist" sentiment': genuinely worthwhile Scottish forums featuring often neglected histories, photographs and memories of local communities.

He next examines topics attached to these spaces in comment threads: e.g., potholes, ugly modernity, failing transport, the 'war on drivers', high-street atrophy, graffiti, overtourism, litter, incompetent governance, lost civic pride and character.

Ellis then notes how contributors contrast grievances with a supposedly 'traditional' golden age before cultural, moral and civic 'decline' set in. He observes simplistic and 'common-sense' solutions offered to complex social, political and economic challenges. He exemplifies how responsibility for problems is pinned on out-groups such as incomers, delinquents, tourists, students and self-serving elites.

Ellis observes these tropes being manipulated by populist elements with an agenda; elements who endlessly repeat messages with persuasively clear, unnuanced and misleading confidence.

This kind of coarsened public discourse could be exploited from across the political spectrum, but Ellis focuses on elements of the far-Right. Their recent attention to themes of urban decline, he says, will not inevitably translate into electoral success in Scotland but may do so, nonetheless. It is a timely and thought-provoking read.

'Declinism, Urban Discourse, and Fertile Ground for the Radical Right in Scotland' is available free at [\[bit.ly/4cY6oTF\]](https://bit.ly/4cY6oTF).—AM



Briefly



In the small hours of 4 Aug, police and firefighters attended the site of a one-vehicle crash on **Howe St**. A 32-year-old driver had lost control exiting **SE Circus Place** and wrecked about 35 ft of railings and stone steps. He left before police arrived at the scene but was afterwards arrested in connection with **road traffic offences** and released pending further enquiry. This is the second recent assault on local street furniture. In June, a black SUV swept down **Broughton St** and damaged about 30 ft of railings at the corner of **E London St and Mansfield Pl**.

Residents are alarmed by the increasing number of rats appearing on **Dublin and Dundas Sts**. They (the rats) are encouraged by a misguided dog walker who leaves piles of seeds and maggots for local pigeons. Concerned neighbours say this has **public-health, property-nuisance and anti-social impacts**. They have posted signs asking for the practice to stop, but so far these have been ignored. The rats are delighted.

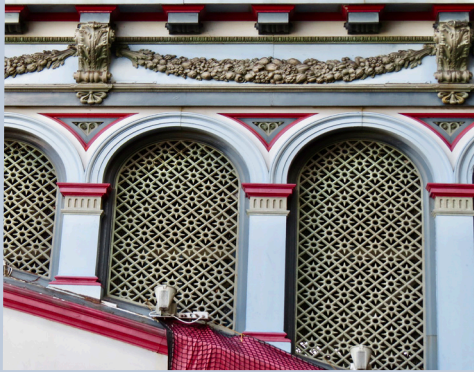
A report by the **Edinburgh Solicitors' Property Centre** in Aug detailed how secondary schools' catchment areas affect property prices. **Average selling prices** for 3-bdrm flats around Boroughmuir, Craigmount, Gillespie's, St Thomas of Aquin's and Balerno CHS ranged from £439k to £577k. Around **Drummond CHS** (covering Broughton, Bellevue, Hillside, Abbeyhill and parts of Leith) they averaged £462k, about £83k more than the general Edinburgh average.

Borlands Darts & Television at **7 Croall Pl** ceased trading in 2025. The family business, established in 1925, moved to this address in the mid-1930s, originally selling radios, furniture and bicycles [\[bit.ly/BDandT\]](https://bit.ly/BDandT). The premises (47.4m2 showroom, hall, WC, workshop, 2 basement rooms) have now gone **on the market for £135k**. 'The property may offer potential for conversion to residential accommodation.'

On the night of 13 Aug, a 22-year-old man was abducted from the **Canonmills** area. Police traced him to Longniddry the next day and made arrests. Five men and a woman appeared in **Edinburgh Sheriff Court** on 17 Aug.

The Parliament Cairn was erected (with permission) on **Calton Hill** in 1993 to mark the first year of the Vigil for a Scottish Parliament. At last month's Culture & Communities Cmte, **Cllr McFarlane** (Ward 11) called for a report on options to bring it under official Council stewardship in advance of possible adoption as a **scheduled monument** by Historic Environment Scotland. He fears that without such action the Cairn is vulnerable and may eventually succumb to 'vandalism and blight'. **Cllr Graham** (Ward 11) seconded the motion, describing the landmark as a monument of national importance.

Moreover ...



Amid general joy spanning all parts of the capital, **North Bridge** reopened to 2-way traffic and pedestrians last month. There was instant criticism of **absent bus stops and no cycling infrastructure or painted lanes**. In Aug 2016, *Spurtle* exclusively reported that the structure required substantial refurbishment to keep it **safe and fit for purpose** [bit.ly/Spwrap]. The project, estimated to cost £22.3m, was scheduled to start in summer 2018 [bit.ly/SpNBr2018] but was delayed by **further investigations** until Nov 2021. At that stage, gloomy Council sources forecast the route could close to northbound traffic for **up to 9 months** [bit.ly/SpNBr2021]. It's been a long 10 years. The final cost of the restoration will be in the region of **£86m**.

Edinburgh Council's purchase of purpose-built student accommodation on **Halmyre St** and conversion of it to provide up to 3 years' temporary accommodation for **230 homeless people** (26/01503/FUL) has caused controversy. Locals say **consultation with neighbours** was negligible. Some are concerned about how reliable will be the vetting of **early-release prisoners**. Some want priority to be given to existing Leithers. Others still worry about the implications of a **faltering PBSA model** elsewhere in the city. Proponents say this is a welcome first step in the Council's **pragmatic and humane**, £1.6b, 5-year programme to house in safe and warm conditions Edinburgh's **6.5k households** who have no permanent home.

In Series 6 of **A House Through Time** (BBC2), David Olusoga examined the history of **20-22 Calton Hill**. Past residents have included the sculptor John Steell and hospitality entrepreneur **Katherine Johnson**. See our website on 1 Sept for more about her.

Councillors on the **Development Management Subcmte** have rejected Royal London's revised proposal to convert offices at **57 Henderson Row** into housing [bit.ly/2bgbyhlf]. Officials earlier criticised its 'adverse **harmful impacts** to the setting of nearby listed buildings and to the character and appearance of the conservation area'. Royal London **can afford to shrink** this 'Frankenstein's Monster'.

A public-spirited reader contacted us last month concerning our coverage in Issue 364 of critical reactions to the Glasgow and World Cup-related summer **confication of public artworks** in Edinburgh. 'I do my bit for Holmes at the top of Leith Walk with a window hook and £5 offer to a likely lad,' he told us. Presumably, the hook is to **drag the lad off the plinth** and the £5 to subsidise his taxi to Accident & Emergency afterwards. We have reservations about this approach.

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Ben Macpherson MSP

Member of the Scottish Parliament for Edinburgh North Eastern and Leith Constituency



HERE TO HELP

I am here to serve and represent you, as your local, active, constituency MSP (Member of the Scottish Parliament) for Edinburgh North Eastern and Leith.

Please get in touch if there's anything you'd like assistance with or to discuss – issues, concerns, ideas and feedback. My team and I are here to help all – no matter who you vote for in elections.

Please see below for details of my monthly 'help and advice surgeries'. These are times when anyone in our area can come and speak with me.

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HELP AND ADVICE SURGERIES

(No appointment is necessary, please just turn up)

FIRST Friday of the month:

2:00pm
Craigentinny Community Centre
9 Loaning Road, EH7 6JE

LAST Friday of the month:

11:00am
Out of the Blue Drill Hall
36 Dalmeny Street, EH6 8RG

– AND –

3:30pm
Piershill Library
30 Piershill Terrace, EH8 7BQ

3:30pm
Leith Library
28-30 Ferry Road, EH6 4AE

Leave and represent

Leith, Western Harbour, Pirg, Belovus, Hillside, Easter Road, Abbeyhill, Meadowbank, Restalrig, Lothend, Loganlea, Morningside, Winton, Alcorn, Northfield, Piershill, Southfield, Craigentinny, Mountbath, Duddingston, Holywood Park.

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