



NEW TOWN QUARTER PLAN FOR STUDENT INFLUX

Some 599 purpose-built student accommodation (PBSA) units are proposed as part of a new planning application lodged by Izar V Lux S.A R.L. and Fusion Edinburgh Propco Ltd for the 2.4 ha New Town Quarter site between Dundas St and King George V Park.

In addition, 315 residential homes (108 mid-market rent), 1 ground-floor retail unit and 'improved public realm' feature in these new elements of the overall proposal (25/01899/FUL).

The revisions replace components offering office space and build-to-rent blocks. Economic and political developments which have occurred since planning permission for these was granted in 2021 (20/03034/FUL)



have rendered them unviable, say the developers.

Many objectors to the proposals say that so much focused student housing would overstretch and unsettle the established neighbourhood. It's undesirable, they say, when: (a) would-be permanent residents struggle to find affordable homes in Edinburgh; (b) despite developers' claims to the contrary, the PBSA market is collapsing. They fear short-term-let use will soon take over unless units can be converted for full-time residents. Some claim daylight levels in the proposed office conversions are insufficient

As a statutory consultee, the New Town & Broughton Community Council will not be constrained by the 4 July deadline most locals face to make their case. NTBCC will articulate locals' opinions, and we suspect it will object.

Read the latest plans in full here [bit.ly/NTQOMG] and comment at [bit.ly/NTQCOM]. Recent *Spurtle* coverage is at [bit.ly/MR4NTQ] and [bit.ly/NTQPBSA].

In theory, a determination is expected by 3 Oct. Developers optimistically anticipate starting construction this autumn and continuing until 2028.

PATIENT MAN'S ABIDING LEGACY



Image: John Telford Smith after Sir John Watson Gordon; William Henry Playfair, 1790–1857, Architect; ©National Galleries of Scotland.

The perfectionist architect William Henry Playfair was born this month on 15 July 1790. His enduring designs for 8 Inverleith Row, the Royal College of Surgeons, St Stephen's Church, Regent, Carlton and Royal Terraces, the City Observatory, and the National, Playfair and Stewart Monuments – integral to the psychological-streetscape of Spurtleshire residents – were achieved, he said, only after a 'monstrous expenditure of patience and India Rubber'. The Calton Hill Conservation Trust will mark the anniversary with a guided walk, one of a growing range and number of events available to members (free) and non-members (donation requested) alike. Find out more at [bit.ly/CHCTevts].

DANGER ON YORK PLACE

Reader Fraser Parkinson recently witnessed the immediate aftermath of an accident on York Pl in which a pedestrian was knocked down by an ebike on the cycleway outside the Conan Doyle pub (Police incident no. 2886 of 30 May).

The incident allegedly occurred during a green-light pedestrian crossing phase. The pedestrian sustained head injuries and an ambulance was called. As passersby helped the injured party, several unrelated bicycles travelled at speed through the red stoplight for cyclists.

Parkinson says, 'I'm keen that no one else in our community is injured at this location. However, I have real concerns that the interaction between cyclists and pedestrians here is unsafe under present arrangements.'

Some online sources* suggest anyone in the UK knocked down by a bike should:

1. If possible, move away from danger to avoid being struck again.
2. Sit or lie down, breathe deeply. Assess any injury. Call 999 if necessary.
3. Get the cyclist's name and contact details.
4. Take photos of the scene from different angles.
5. Get witnesses' names and contact details if they're willing to describe what they saw.
6. As soon as possible, report the incident in person to the police. Ask for an incident number and the name of the officer you speak to.
7. Visit a GP to check and confirm any (even minor) injury you may have sustained.
8. Keep records of all medical visits and damage to personal possessions.
9. If necessary, contact your insurer and/or seek legal advice from a solicitor specialising in cycle accidents.

**Spurtle* takes no responsibility for this advice.



Briefly



New at **13A Dundas St** is the Palestinian Museum Scotland: a gallery exclusively dedicated to contemporary work by local and international **Palestinian creatives** working in painting, sculpture, embroidery, installation and video. It is the first and only exhibition space of its kind in Europe. The aim of founder **Faisal Salah** is to re-emphasise the humanity, suffering and talent of Palestinian people. Local writer **Kenny Farquharson's** nuanced piece on the complexities of agitprop in general and polarised Middle Eastern politics in particular appears at ***The Jaggy Thistle*** [bit.ly/jgyths].

Last month, the Council's **Planning Local Review Body** upheld the Development Management Subcmte's earlier decision to refuse consent for a BT Street Hub and the removal of 4 old phone kiosks near **117 Dundas St** (Issues 319, 347).

The **Friends of Pilrig Park** want improved lighting of paths at night and on dark winter evenings. Council officials are supportive but also aim to encourage **potential roosting for birds and bats** by installing red lamps (dimmed to 35%) in an unspecified number of unspecified **'isolated locations'**. The Friends seek greater clarity.

Locals report unsolicited emails from the **nextdoor** website offering 'free items in Broughton'. They also mention failures by that website to implement supposedly 'successful' requests to **unsubscribe from a service** they hadn't subscribed to in the first place. Let us know of your experience.

The Leith Collective in **Ocean Terminal** seeks donations of good-quality uniforms, coats, gym kits, shoes, bags, pencil cases and other essentials for pick-up by anyone who needs them – **no questions asked** – for school next session.

Dangerously eroded steps and their rotten supports between **Summerbank** and **King George V Park** were reported by locals via FixMyStreet in late Apr and repaired/ replaced by Council staff in early June. They are now smarter and safer, for which we're grateful. But **adequate routine inspection** would surely not have let them reach that previous state of decay. Elsewhere in the Park, **new swails coped well** with the first downpour of summer on 14 June.

Police Scotland appealed for information after a teenage girl suffered a serious sexual assault in a **York Place** basement storage area shortly after 5am on Sun 25 May 2025. A 20-year-old man was arrested one week later and appeared at Edinburgh Sheriff Court on 2 June. A report has been sent to the Procurator Fiscal. More at [bit.ly/3ZjGnaP].

Festive blows and ongoing discussions

An Outcome Report to last month's Culture & Communities Cmte shows bad-weather closures caused a combined 1m reduction in footfall at the latest Edinburgh's Christmas & Edinburgh's Hogmanay events compared to the 2023/24 events.

The Council expects to recover £140k of the grant funding it spent to support events (i.e. those events which were later cancelled) but does not say when. It is conducting an open-book audit of Edinburgh's Hogmanay to confirm 'no enrichment' resulted from cancellations.

Meanwhile, officials are in 'ongoing discussions' with Unique Assembly Ltd about outstanding payments worth nearly £250k for Winter Festival-related charges including fixed-fee income, rentals, hires, licensing, planning permission, building warrants and traffic management. The amount represents about 37% of the city's expected income (£669k) from this source.

The Council is aware of the terms of the contract and the potential remedies available to it and will continue to take appropriate steps to recover the sums in line with the



All change at Albany House

Artisan Albany House Ltd plans to change the Simpson & Marwick office at 58 Albany St into a 102-bedroom (204-guest), budget-level hotel operated by Whitbread as a Premier Inn (25/02873/FUL).

The current sandstone exteriors of the building would be retained, as would the overall form and massing. A broadly similar roof would replace the no-longer-fire-compliant original from 1983. A small recessed extension of the top floor would be added above the existing Albany St projection. Smaller windows would replace those at ground-floor level on Broughton St. A new ramp would improve access to the main entrance.

All servicing, deliveries and waste collection would be via the existing service lane to the north of the site, where there would also be covered storage for 11 bikes. It is recommended to provide 4 bat boxes (+ suitable gaps), 4 swift boxes and 4 sparrow boxes. Gulls, pigeons and peregrine falcons would be protected if found nesting during construction but otherwise afforded no special attention, not even a complimentary shower cap.

Spurtle would prefer not to see further concentration of tourism in the area. However, if we can't avoid it, as seems probable, then this is a relatively inoffensive addition. A report by Turley Economics suggests the hotel could raise £150k pa in business rates, create 20 jobs worth (a modest) £340k pa in wages, and add £2.2m pa to the local economy from spend by 46.9k visitors. It is easy to see how Broughton St shops, bars and restaurants might benefit.

For previous occupation of this site – what was and what might have been – see Issue 188.



To the Editor of the *Mercury*

Extracted from the Caledonian Mercury (23.7.1825), published 5 days before the laying of the Royal High School's foundation stone.

SIR—It would seem as if our Civic Rulers were under the double anathema to be always in the wrong, in the worst possible way. The Council have resolved, in their wisdom to build a new school, and to place this darling child of their old age (and a rickety bantling it is likely to prove) on the very verge of the habitable world, in direct contact with the chimneys and the smoke of foundries, gas works, &c. and far enough removed from the centre of the school going population.

The grandeur and beauty of the most magnificent promenade in the world is deeply injured: and the Calton Hill, the pride of citizens, and the admiration of strangers—the spot which of all others, should be preserved with the utmost care for the recreation of the inhabitants—is to be surrendered to school-boys, to the imminent hazard of their own necks and the heads of others, with abundance of materials for the legitimate occupation of bickering [not least with 'Toun Rats'].



I fear that their regular attendance must be seriously interrupted by winter storms. There is not a wind that blows, that does not beat furiously on that spot; not a person in their senses, who can avoid it, thinks of visiting it in the winter months.

I question not the absolute right of the Council (as distinguished from prudence and judgment) to endow whatever school they think fit, on the top of Arthur Seat if they please, but at their own responsibility and risk be it.—PHILO DUNEDIN

Unwelcome appearance of bright idea



Image: P. Gillespie.

In late May, after dark, Café Piccante began projecting a large, purple-and-yellow, moving advertisement across Broughton St onto the east-facing façade of A-listed St Paul's & St George's Church.

The bold initiative has raised feathers and ruffled eyebrows among some in the neighbourhood. One local describes it to us as a 'lurid abomination'. Others have raised concerns with the church itself.

P's & G's Operations Director Andrew Marrian tells us the projection is unauthorised and appeared without permission or payment being sought. The leadership team wants it to stop at once and is seeking advice before approaching Café Piccante

to find an amicable and neighbourly solution.

'Whilst we understand the place for bold and innovative marketing strategies and acknowledge that local businesses need to do what they can to remain profitable,' says Marrian, 'we trust that good sense and courtesy will prevail in this case and that the dignity of a historic place of worship will be restored'.

Monitoring the monitors

Edinburgh's Low Emission Zone, discouraging the most polluting vehicles from entering the city centre, is one year old. Officials say over 95% of vehicles entering it now meet required standards, with 3% exempted.

Residents worry that non-compliant vehicles find alternative routes through adjacent areas of Spurtleshire, but the Council is unforthcoming about if and where this is being monitored.

The Council is working with SEPA officials to process figures for Edinburgh's NO₂ levels in 2024. A statutory report will go to the Scottish Govt 'later' this year or 2026.

Coining it in

Shoppers at Tesco Broughton Rd and Duke St branches and Asda on Ocean Drive E can now use a kiosk to convert unsorted small change into vouchers redeemable as cash at the Customer Service desk. 'No counting, sorting, or bagging required. Just pour your coins into a machine and let us do the work.'

But be aware these automated helpmates charge a 39p transaction fee and an 11.75% processing fee. For charity donations, the processing fee is 8.9%.

'All fees may vary by location' and vouchers must be redeemed on the day of issue. *Spurtle's* call to the Coinstar helpline clarifies that its machines accept up to £999 in small change and confirms our experience that sums totalling less than 47p are neither processed nor returned but swallowed.

Customers can of course pay for items without paying a fee by using notes and coins at the normal supermarket checkout desks and self-service machines.

Coinstar kiosks feature three screens of difficult-to-read terms and conditions. Among them is a list of objects other than clean and undamaged coins which should not be inserted into the machinery as they are 'unacceptable and may affect functionality'.

These include cat litter, dog food, earthworms, fingernails and goldfish. On our website (2 July), we transcribe the full list as an item of found poetry and an interesting sidelight on human nature.



New funding for Powderhall



The Scottish Govt is putting £1.4m towards developing all aspects of the Powderhall site at 165 Broughton Rd.

Responding to the Vacant & Derelict Land Investment Programme allocation, Edinburgh's Housing, Homelessness & Fair Work Convener Lezley Cameron (pictured) said, 'Regenerating a historic, brownfield site like Powderhall is complex, challenging, and costly, and therefore I warmly welcome this Scottish Government investment.'

Proposals for the Powderhall site, promising 259 homes plus work and community spaces, stalled in Dec last year [bit.ly/PwdPD]. Officials now claim contract details are being finalised and work will start on the bowling-green site in Oct. Less precisely, design revisions for the wider scheme have 'taken longer than anticipated but we hope to be in a position to progress that phase of the site in the near future'. Yet more 'final works' are yet again being completed in the Stables building.

Briefly



Having spruced up Ward 12 (**Leith Walk**) in Apr (not sure where), unspecified Council staff taking 'pride in our city' will next turn their attention to Ward 5 (**Inverleith**) in July and Ward 11 (**City Centre**) in Aug. Cross-service teams will tackle chewing gum, graffiti, dog fouling and other dumped items. **Community events** (whatever that means) are planned and you can tell officials what you think and where they should focus by emailing [cleanstreets@edinburgh.gov.uk].

Friends of Montgomery St Park will publish a second issue of *Parklife* magazine soon and are fundraising £800 to pay for it. The **Culture & Communities Cmte's** long-delayed decision on who uses the Park (Issue 347) has been postponed until the dog days of summer in Aug.

A motion by Cllrs **Finlay McFarlane** (Ward 11) and **Vicky Nicholson** (Ward 5) gained unanimous support from the Development Management Subcmte last month. It aims to establish how small annual grants for **Friends and Trust groups** can be formalised under future Parks & Green Spaces budgets. Members agreed that '**spend-to-save**' sums will help groups leverage extra funds and volunteer hours to achieve **useful improvements** in cooperation with officers. Council third-sector funding typically achieves a 1:7 return on investment.

Within Spurtleshire, new **cycle hangars** are proposed for E Claremont St, Pilrig St, Spey Ter and Summerbank. Additional **bike racks** are being considered for Elm Row, Haddington Pl and Leith Walk.

Cafe Calton, close to the Collective Gallery on **Calton Hill**, commenced operations on 22 June. With stunning views down over the capital, it is **not to be confused** with the longer-established Calton View Café on **Jeffrey St**, which boasts an acute accent and stunning views up across **Cranston St** to the cliffs of **Calton Hill** beyond.

In Issue 351 we highlighted the **extraordinary level of support** expressed for short-term-let applications coordinated by **commercial planning agents**. New Town & Broughton Community Council is also aware of the phenomenon and wonders **what, if any, advantage** could be gained by potentially gaming the system like this. Under normal circumstances, applications receiving **20 or more objections** require consideration by elected members on the Development Management Subcmte rather than by officials alone. No such consequence attends **20 or more letters of support**, so what's going on? Could it be that an appeal to the DPEA after a **subcmte decision** is thought to stand a better chance than an appeal to the Council's Planning Local Review Body after a **decision by delegated authority**? NTBCC is unaware of any such advantage in practice.

Moreover ...



Five new foldable bollards have appeared at **5-Ways Junction** on the N Edin Cycle Network. Two of them will not long detain drivers **willing to drive round them** on the grass verges. Which of them, we wonder, will deter drivers in **other people's cars** prepared to drive through and over them?

Leith Central Community Council has objected to plans to extend the guesthouse at **36 Pilrig St** (23/07203/FUL), increasing occupancy from 18 to 28 beds. It would, they say, harm the character and appearance of the **Conservation Area** and adversely impact local amenity.

Royal London Group aims to convert its former offices at **53 Henderson Row** into 65 build-for-rent flats (around 23 of them tenure-blind **affordable housing**). RLG would manage the units (5 studios, 27x1 bdrm, 26x2 bdrm, 7x3 bdrm) itself for the long term. A planning application is expected **early this month**.

Too late for us to report here, on 26 June the Transport & Environment Cmte voted on whether to approve a report on **communal bin hubs in the New Town**. Officials advised that most consultees favoured bins over switching to gull-proof sacks. Critics said the consultation process ignored **evidence and local experience** gathered during a 2-year trial, was misleadingly vague or silent about options, and unsurprisingly told officers **exactly what they'd wanted to hear all along**. As with any flawed data analysis: rubbish in, rubbish out.

Contractors, parents and even government agencies have long muddled St Mary's RC Primary School in **E London St** (in the Parish of St Mary's Catholic Cathedral) with St Mary's RC Primary School in **Links Gdns** (in the Parish of St Mary, Star of the Sea). Following a report last month, the **Education, Children & Families Cmte** has now decided to avoid future confusion by renaming St Mary's RC Primary School in time for the new school session in Aug.

Do you have what it takes to Spurtle? We're looking for someone to join our unpaid Team and share in the regular page lay-out of **monthly printed editions** (which also appear as pdfs online). We need someone with patience, an eye for detail, and experience of – or willingness to learn – **InDesign**. A sense of humour would help, and a commitment to stick with us. To **find out more**, contact [spurtle@hotmail.co.uk].

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