

Spurttle



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BROUGHTON'S INDEPENDENT STIRRER Free

GILBERT GOES TO WESTMINSTER

Scottish Labour's Tracy Gilbert (pictured) was elected to represent Edinburgh North & Leith in the UK General Election on 4 July. Her majority over the incumbent Deidre Brock (SNP) was 7,268. Turnout was 49.5k: 63% of the 78.4k eligible to vote, a drop on 2019 showing ENL voters very much in tune with the national mood.

Tracy Gilbert (*Labour*): votes, 20,805 (42.1%); shift, +20.4. Deidre Brock (*SNP*): votes, 13,537 (27.4%); shift, -16.4. Kayleigh O'Neill (*Green*): votes, 5,417 (10.9%); shift, +7.6. Mike Andersen (*LibDem*): votes, 3,879 (7.8%); shift, -4.7. Joanna Mowat (*Conservative*): votes, 3,254 (6.6%); shift, -11. Alan Melville (*Reform UK*): votes, 1,818 (3.7%); shift, +2.8. David Jacobsen (*Socialist Labour*): votes, 227 (0.5%); shift, +0.5. Niel Deepnarain (*Scottish Family*): votes, 210 (0.4%); shift, +0.4. Richard Shillcock (*Communist*): votes, 189 (0.4%); shift, +0.4. Caroline Waterloo (—): votes, 139 (0.3%); shift, +0.3.



Looking back, looking forward

So ended the 9-year Commons career of Deidre Brock, an approachable, effective and hard-working MP who, as well as numerous Committee appointments, served variously as Shadow SNP spokesperson on Devolved Government Relations, Northern Ireland, Fair Work & Employment, the Environment, Food & Rural Affairs, COP26, House of Commons Business and as SNP Leader of the House of Commons. We thank her.

So began the Commons career of Tracy Gilbert, a Leith-based former trade-union official who, as a candidate, pledged to stand up for local services, working people and 'what is best for our area', to fight for affordable and social housing, and to make the case for investment in the local economy. We wish her well.

If you enjoyed the General Election and now yearn to relive parts of it with the benefit of hindsight, read our report of the *Spurttle* hustings and view a full video of the event at [bit.ly/Sphust].

ROOM FOR ONE MORE

A new artwork is proposed for the St Mary's RC Cathedral complex adjoining Little King St.

It's called *Jesus the Homeless* and depicts a life-size figure sleeping on a bench, hidden beneath a blanket except for his feet. These bear the stigmata of Christ.

The Canadian artist Timothy Schmalz is a devout Catholic, and this particular work has been described as a 'visual translation' of Matthew 24:40: 'Then shall he answer them, saying, "Truly say I t'ye, in-as-muckle as ye did it to ane o' thae my brethren, e'en they least anes, ye did it to me!"' (William Wye Smith, *New Testament in Braid Scots*, 1904).

The work has provoked controversy since its inception in 2013. Some consider it demeaning, some find it creepy, others applaud its provocative tug at the social conscience. Cast in bronze, it has been produced in series, and over 50 copies already appear at locations around the world including N America and Glasgow. Thanks to the backing of a generous benefactor, Schmalz approached St Mary's and offered to provide the work free of charge.

If the Council gives consent for the statue here (24/02828/FUL), groundwork will begin almost at once. It is hoped that the piece will be in place by this autumn.



CITY TREES – NOT JUST RUST



In Issue 160 of the *Leither*, Tracy Griffen of Griffen Fitness recounted her efforts to beautify a planter at the Balfour St end of Arthur St. With Council consent, she began improving the soil here in May and has since nurtured or planted a maple tree, silver-leaf evergreens, thistles, lilies, teasels, buddleia, nasturtiums, Swiss chard, poppies, spearmint, foxgloves, radishes and sunflowers. The result is a delightful attraction for wildlife and locals alike. 'This planter will improve with time,' says Griffen. 'The plants are all establishing in their new home, so please be patient.'

HIGH TIME FOR BARRIER TO CLOSE

The Calton Hill Conservation Trust last month issued a statement calling on Edinburgh Council to set a date of no later than 1 Oct for closing the road barrier to general unauthorised traffic entering from Regent Rd.

CHCT notes that Council policy is against allowing general traffic in parks, but – despite clear signage to the contrary – unauthorised vehicles take advantage of the open barrier day and night.

The barrier was repaired in Feb this year, and CHCT understands the Council has costed additional features which would allow maintenance staff, local businesses and people with accessibility needs to come and go at will.

But it says current unlimited road access presents an 'unacceptable danger' to pedestrians, especially children and wheelers. 'The lack of a safe footpath and limited space for passing vehicles further compounds these risks.'

CHCT complains that many unauthorised drivers are also associated with litter and anti-social behaviour. It says there are problems with food packaging, gas cylinders, amplifiers, fireworks and electric generators. Some Calton Hill visitors accuse their critics of being joyless NIMBYs.

Spurttle has approached Council officials for comment.

Briefly



Rennick Development plans to fill a modest car park on land south of **15 Henderson PI** with nine 1 and 2-bdrm flats over 5 storeys (24/02964/FUL). The **Design Statement** says that 'The initial massing block fills the site extents for maximum utilisation of space.' Or in other words, stuffs as much in as possible. Potential residents could access a **ground-floor, mezzanine or rooftop garden**, and enjoy 20 cycle spaces. Rennick says the proposal would provide sufficient daylight and minimum overlooking.

Local historian **Leslie Hills** will appear at the Edinburgh International Book Festival on 16 Aug in conversation with crime writer **Val McDermid**. Their chat will follow *10 Scotland Street's* release in paperback, which work we recommended in Dec last year (Issue 335).

The *Edinburgh Minute* reports that **Friends of Montgomery St Park** plan to launch a new hyperlocal community paper in early Oct. They seek **volunteer writers, designers, illustrators and editors** keen to share the story of the park and its surrounding community [bit.ly/FMGSPK].

Five local parks are among 38 of Edinburgh's 144 public green spaces to have received a **Keep Scotland Beautiful Green Flag Award** this summer: Hopetoun Cres Gdn, Inverleith Pk, King George V Pk, London Rd Gdns and Victoria Pk. Calton Hill, Pilrig Pk and St Mark's Pk did not feature.

This summer, Edinburgh Council's **Thriving Green Space Team** has been inviting local input on redevelopment of the not-so-thriving **Regent Rd Bowling Green and Park**. The Regent Community Bowling Club, whose lease here dated from 1996, has **transferred stewardship** back to the Parks Dept due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. **Community groups** such as Colony of Artists, Abbeyhill Action, Leith Community Growers and the Regent, Royal, Carlton Terraces & Mews Assoc are among those offering ideas.

On 8 Aug, the **Culture & Communities Cmte** will consider reimposing a ban on dogs entering Edinburgh's **43 Council-owned cemeteries**. The ban, from which assistance dogs were exempt, was lifted during Covid pandemic lockdowns.

A **thought-provoking and controversial thread** by @SW20 on social-media platform X last month looked at the possible benefits, practicalities and problems of introducing a 2-ring system of **traffic congestion charges** for the capital. *Spartle* thinks this is a **difficult but necessary conversation** for citizens and elected members to have in advance of Council elections in 2027. You can pick up the thread here on our website at [bit.ly/3LjTJfS].

Safety first for Council HGVs

Those who recall the tragic death of cyclist Craig Newton at Broughton Point in 2011 may take some comfort in ongoing improvements made to the design and use of Edinburgh Council's 210 HGVs and 90 welfare buses.

Advanced Emergency Braking System technology has been fitted to 115 Council-run truck-mounted vehicles since 2015. This uses radar to help prevent collisions. Retrofitting to older vehicles is not possible. All Council bin lorries will carry AEBS by the end of this year.

Radar detection of cyclists passing on the nearside of vehicles, and audible and visual warnings, have been specified on all Council truck-mounted systems since 2016, and as part of fleet replacement all vehicles are expected to carry the technology by the end of 2025. It will also be fitted to 27 welfare buses this year.

In addition to Council drivers taking Certificate of Professional Competence Training every year, they also undergo annual training which focuses on vulnerable road users. Onboard telematics can verify vehicles are in working order and whether bin-lorry drivers follow best practice by avoiding high-risk areas (e.g. around schools) at busy times.

The details emerged in a Report to the Governance, Risk & Best Value Cmte earlier this summer. For previous coverage of similar issues, see [bit.ly/HGVtech].



New insights on Powderhall active-travel corridor

A 'Powderhall Railway Path Feasibility Study' produced by the Jacobs consultancy for the Council in January 2023 and related correspondence were acquired by the Capital Rail Action Group under Freedom of Information rules earlier this year [bit.ly/PdRL].

The report gives total construction (high-level) cost estimates for the project varying between £5.9m and £8.4m (including preliminaries, landscaping, railway works and inflation).

It contains sections comprehensible to the general reader on ecological assets and historical background. There is also a strategic assessment of placemaking from which we quote below.

'Currently the rail line acts as a physical boundary/dividing line between different socio-economic groups. The Powderhall Railway Path could link a series of areas with well-established and active communities and there is a real opportunity to employ a place-based approach to the development of the route.

'The creation of access points onto the route will form new physical connections between existing communities and improve east-west movement through this area of the city which is currently dominated by strong north-south movements along Leith Walk and Easter Rd.

'The vision looks to create a new linear park along the former Powderhall to Lochend rail line. The park will serve multiple functions: extending the existing off-road cycle and footpath network from St Mark's Park, providing new recreational facilities, acting as an ecological corridor, interpreting and highlighting the industrial heritage of the area, and becoming a connecting social space for the surrounding communities.'

Prickly response to Picardy Place

As reported in Issue 341, 4 of the 11 saplings gracing Fantasy Island are already dead. However, it emerged last month that at least 2 of them might have been dead on arrival.

City-centre councillor Finlay McFarlane expressed disappointment at the news and said he had raised the issue with officials. He pointed out that while the choice of species here was the responsibility of Council officers, the actual installation of them had been carried out by a private contractor. MacFarlane's remarks appeared as part of a longer *Spartle*-originated conversation about Picardy PI planting progress followed by over 10.5k people on social-media platform X.

Referring to the gyratory in general, Joyce McMillan commented, 'They've pulled off the amazing trick of creating a junction that's terrible for pedestrians, terrible for cars and buses, terrible for bikes, and not even that good for the trams. Shocking design.'

Michael McLeod wrote, 'I'd argue that the unelected people involved in "designing" it have had more impact on the city than some elected politicians. Shame we can't vote them out. Or even find out who they are. Shame on them for wasting so many people's time every day. Hours of lost productivity.' You can read a variety of transcribed opinions at [bit.ly/PicPlpp].



Green ways to improve Spurtleshire

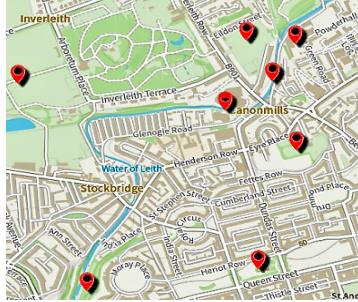
The Edinburgh Nature Network is a joint initiative between the Scottish Wildlife Trust and Edinburgh Council.

It describes itself as ‘a long-term strategic approach to manage, restore and enhance the urban landscape. It highlights opportunities to take action across the city, using natural solutions to address the threats of biodiversity loss and climate change.

‘It focuses on creating a well-connected, healthy, resilient ecosystem whilst enhancing the ability of the city to adapt to climate change, providing multiple benefits to wildlife, human society and the economy.’

Potential Spurtleshire projects on the online map [bit.ly/ENNmap] are:

- Inverleith Pk: enhance grassland; improve pond water quality and understanding of local hydrology.
- Inverleith and Stockbridge: protect Water of Leith and create an ecological buffer; enhance habitats; plant native species on biomatrix rafts; in new developments use green and ‘brownfield roofs’, rain gardens, sustainable drainage systems, reedbed filters; native hedging, nectar-rich meadows and window boxes.
- Warriston Recreation Ground: enhance habitats, create wetland to mitigate flooding and provide habitats.
- King George V Park: restore wetlands to mitigate flooding.
- Private parks and gardens: enhance habitats and support wildlife through land-management practices.
- Leith Walk: provide more habitats and ecosystem services.
- Calton Hill: stepping-stone habitats (window boxes, green roofs and rooftop gardens) connecting to the Meadows and Princes St Gdns.
- Pilrig Pk: connect to Leith Links with green corridors. This work is already in progress.



Briefly



Harburn Hobbies has experienced a boom in business since the return of trams to **Leith Walk**. Present here since the 1930s, the firm commented on Facebook last month that its trade is now busier than it’s been for decades. A spokesperson said, ‘You were all driving past us to ASDA before and never stopping. That was the same for most of us down the Walk ... Now folks are walking past and seeing what’s on offer. Oh aye, and we even won an award [Bachmann Europe’s Retailer of the Year, 2023].’ Former Transport & Environment Cmte convener **Cllr Lesley Macinnes** feels vindicated and said so on X.



A **5-storey structure** of red brick, zinc and glass comprising one 3-bdrm and eight 2-bdrm flats and eleven 1-bdrm studios could replace the former garage at **21 McDonald Pl** if Council planners approve a proposal by McD Homes Ltd (24/03104/FUL). A 4-storey block of 11 homes was approved for this site in Feb 2017, but consent has since lapsed. Adjacent properties would, says the developer, not be overshadowed. Internal cycle and bin storage would be provided, as would **bat and bird boxes**, sedum roof, solar PV panels and sustainable drainage with permeable paving. *Spurtle* finds the exterior heart-stoppingly ho-hum. As we went to press, **37 objections** had been lodged.

Detectives have appealed for witnesses and dashcam footage after a 19-year-old man was stabbed in the arm in **Victoria Pk** on 12 July at around 6.50pm. Two men involved in the assault, **both in their 20s and wearing black**, left the scene on Sur-Ron-style motorbikes in the direction of **Craighall Rd**.

Edinburgh Council has responded to *Spurtle’s* **Freedom of Information** request seeking reasons for delays to work at **Powderhall Stables** and adjacent developments (see Breaking News on our website on 1 Aug). In brief, **electrical and incoming water connections** at the Stables are expected to be completed this summer. Negotiations with Scottish Water about how to drain into the **Water of Leith** remain problematic. A tender to build mixed nursery/senior housing (approved in Nov 2021) on the former bowling greens is still being considered.

Carol Nimmo, former chair of the New Town & Broughton Community Council, became chair of the **Royal High School Preservation Trust** on 20 June. The Council gave conditional consent for proposals to create a National Music Centre here (24/01804/FUL, Issues 339, 341) on 22 July.

Shanks for the memory

This 19th-century toilet has been on temporary display in the Canonmills window of Napier Bathrooms & Interiors over the summer, on loan from George Pirie Antiques of Howe Street.

The accompanying explanation explains that the item was first installed in Ballater Station for the exclusive use of Queen Victoria going to and from Balmoral.

Victoria’s displeasure with the previous facilities there prompted a local councillor to contact the company’s directors. He wrote, ‘The expense could only be a trifle for making a small room of the kind required, and would appear as a kindly offer of respect coming unsolicited from the Railway.’

‘Should the Railway not have the funds to do so, I have no doubt other Railways drawing advantage from the traffic would gladly contribute, although I think you will agree it would look better coming from the Deeside Railway alone, if you could manage it.’



Eric Robinson remembered 2 July 1930—12 June 2024

Eric Robinson was born in Hanley, Stoke on Trent, on 2 July 1930 to Carrie and Leslie Robinson. Music played a significant part in Eric’s life, right from the start. His father Leslie was a violinist who played in various amateur and semi-professional groups, as well as being an accomplished cinema musician.

After 2 years’ compulsory military service in the Royal Air Force, Eric taught English in France for 2 years. This was probably the beginning of his lifelong love affair with European culture. Next, he studied History of Art at Edinburgh University, completing postgraduate studies there as a mature student in 1962. It was here that he met a fellow student, Norman Young, and began a loving partnership which endured until Norman’s death in the late 1990s. Immediately after his academic studies, Eric became Head of the Department of Art and Design History at Wolverhampton Polytechnic, where he remained until 1985.

Eric was Liberal Party parliamentary candidate for Wolverhampton South West in 1970, standing against Enoch Powell, and then stood in Ludlow in the General Elections of 1974 and 1979. He was a district councillor for Bridgnorth and a county councillor for Shropshire between 1973 and 1986.

Eric returned to live in Broughton Pl in 1986, and was Director of SALVO, the Scottish Arts Lobby, until 1997. He was Administrator of Community Arts Scotland between 1989 and 1998, and then became co-ordinator of Voluntary Arts Scotland. In 1992, he became a lecturer in Design History and Contemporary Studies at Dundee University, a post he only resigned in his 80s, so that he could travel more freely and enjoy opera and the fine-arts scene around Europe.

His loss is an enormous one, felt by us all.—*Brett Morris*. [A longer version of this obituary appears on our website, 8.6.24.]



Moreover ...



A new **National Transport Trust red wheel** (the fourth in Spurtleshire) now adorns the boundary wall outside Lothian Buses' depot on **Annandale St**. The garage, from which LB shows a marked reluctance to budge, has been in operation since 1926. Before that, it was a **short-lived exhibition hall**. For coverage of that brief and almost forgotten iteration, see the article here [bit.ly/SpBrkNws] on 1 Aug.

Officials have approved revised plans to build 6-floor purpose-built student accommodation (65 rooms) at **16 Dunedin St** (24/01451/FUL). Ten locals objected on grounds including: inadequate notification, loss of light, overlooking, too many students/tourists, oppressive design, potentially disruptive roof parties and parking impacts. The **Cockburn Assoc** again called for a coherent overall plan in the Beaverlands.

In response to a recent motion by **Ward 5's Cllr Bandel**, Transport, Planning and Regulatory officers will liaise to review guidance on tables-and-chairs permits on city footways. It is suggested that Edinburgh Street Design Guidance be incorporated within **Edinburgh Design Guidance** to ensure a minimum clear zone of 1.5m is provided and up to 3m in areas of **heavy pedestrian footfall**. Officials will also seek to close a loophole whereby some retailers don't seek or pay for licences for product display stands and other street clutter.

E Claremont St resident Shane Carter has been circulating a petition calling for the Council to improve cleaning of footways, roads and gullies in **Broughton and Bellevue**. He is dismayed by the level of litter, spillages from communal bins, leaves, debris, detritus and ankle-high weeds. 'The way the service is currently organised, executed and delivered is failing us all and requires immediate revision.' For details, email: shane.carter1071@outlook.com. In a separate development, reader E. Brown fears invasive North American **horsetweed (Erigeron canadensis)** is spreading rapidly across the barony. It may have anti-bacterial, anti-fungal, anti-inflammatory, anti-oxidant and insect-repellent qualities, and it may be nutritious and aromatic, but it doesn't belong here. She urges prompt Council attention.

How are your family mealtimes? Are they enjoyable and orderly occasions marked by healthy appetites and polite conversation? Or are they more like the Battle of Bannockburn but with less banter. A flyer available in **Stockbridge Library** advertises free classes at the Edinburgh Finishing School on **George St** for children aged 7+. They cover table manners, general etiquette and confidence in speaking in public, and are run by a mother of 4 who says 2-hour sessions filled with **games and mindfulness** can be more effective than a classroom setting or parental nagging at home. Contact 07942 383627 for details.

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<https://leithcentralcc.co.uk>

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