

Spurtle



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BROUGHTON'S INDEPENDENT STIRRER Free

**September
2024**

No 343

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MARSHALL'S COURT: NO CASE TO KNOCK DOWN

New Town & Broughton Community Council and the Cockburn Assoc last month joined 12 others in objecting to plans to demolish a 4-bdrm detached dwelling and erect 12 short-term-let apartments in its place at 11 Marshall's Ct (24/02959/FULST). This area forms the quiet pastrami sandwiched between Calton Hill and Baxter's Pl.

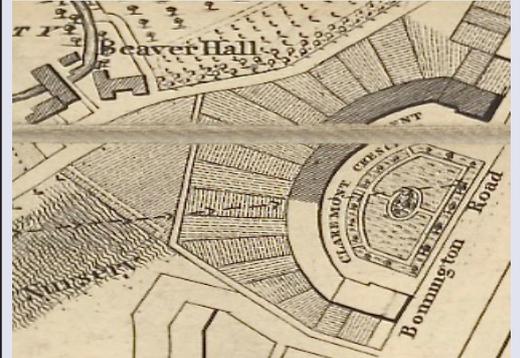
Their concerns included the fact that the property is less than 10 years old and has no known structural defects which might justify its replacement. Increasing the number of people here could worsen the area's existing problems with drainage and flooding. Loss of the building's integral garage could result in on-street parking congestion with ill effects for servicing of neighbours.

In its brief existence, NTBCC alleges, the property has operated only as an STL, often with 'raucous' parties disturbing locals. Permission to run as an STL has been refused on several occasions. NTBCC regards the current application as an attempt to circumvent these decisions.

The Cockburn concluded: 'It is clear that the proposed demolition of a modern residential home in Edinburgh is counter-productive in the context of the climate and housing emergencies. Instead, efforts should be directed towards the retention, sustainable renovation and expansion of the existing housing stock.' A determination is expected by 11 Sept.



OLD SOURCE OF 'NEW' INVADER?



In Issue 342 we reported the pervasive presence in Edinburgh of Canadian horseweed or fleabane, which we assumed to be a relative newcomer to these shores. We now learn that botanists cataloguing species in the Parisian Jardin des Plantes in 1653 suspected it had entered France on imported North American pelts. That set us thinking: Could our population have spread from Beaver Hall, where beaver hats were first manufactured from 1683 onwards by one Captain Thomas Hamilton, merchant in Edinburgh? The detail above is from Kirkwood's *Plan of the City of Edinburgh and Town of Leith, 1851*.

St JAMES SQUARE TO STAY VEHICLE-FREE

On 15 Aug, members of the Transport & Environment Cmte voted 9:2 to keep St James Sq as a pedestrian-only space prioritising gathering and performance.

The W Hotel and developer Nuveen had argued for controlled access (using staff-operated bollards) from Elder St by a limited number of minibuses and taxis serving the front entrance.

They said this was a reasonable expectation based on the original Planning consent. Denial of vehicular access would 'diminish the experience' of visiting VIPs and damage the hotel's commercial reputation and viability.

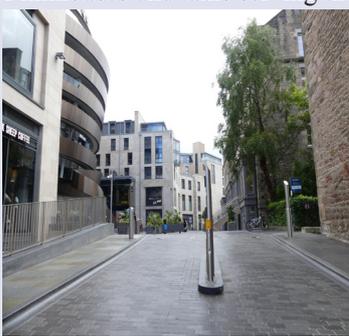
Although recommending approval of that overall aim and the call for a Traffic Regulation Order to enable it, officials said Planning consent had always contained caveats that vehicle access was subject to later approval by the Roads Authority (Edinburgh Council). The Growth Accelerator Model which leveraged investment into the St James Qtr project 'could not fetter the discretion of statutory function'.

Cllr Aston said Nuveen's claims of 'historical' access here referred to the different (and now lost) streetscape around New St Andrew House. He thought customer experience would be improved not diminished by prioritising pedestrians.

Cllr Laing argued that there was no practical way to control the number of taxis entering the square (in total rather than at any one time) or to tell in advance whether they were truly accessing the hotel. Cllr Whyte supported Nuveen's case, saying it was important to take note of the developer's expectations and those of VIP guests. He believed standard operating practices would ensure safety. Moving his own amendment, T&E convener Cllr Arthur said a vehicle-free St James Sq would provide a fantastic space for public and hotel users alike.

Reaction received by the *Spurtle* spans those who think the Council is anti-business, those wanting no addition whatsoever to city-centre traffic, those craving peaceful spaces, and those who distrust tinsel show and feel a guest's a guest for a' that. Not all observers share officers' confidence, pointing to the 'Approval of Matters as Specified Conditions' (08/03361/OUT) as possible grounds for a legal challenge.

For a comments thread and useful links on the subject, see [bit.ly/WHWtf].



NOT DEDICATED ENOUGH



Spurtle published this photo (showing Elm Row) on X last month along with a suggestion that pedestrians take care when passing on the inside of such vehicles. It reached over 7k people and occasioned some lively comments, not all of them entirely complimentary about the Editor [bit.ly/sntch1].

Contrary to assertions, the latter had not 'snatched' about anyone to anybody else, or so much as hinted at the new online tool for reporting these infringements by private and commercial drivers [bit.ly/sntch2]. We trust that clarifies matters.

Since 29 Jan this year, over 3.5k tickets have been issued for parking-on-footway infringements in Edinburgh.

Briefly



Reader @xanabe has alerted us on X to an appreciation of the work of **Kenneth Clark MBE**, whose assemblage of colourful tiles beautifies the Waverley Exchange on **E London St**. You can read the article here [bit.ly/ClarkMBE] and previous *Spurtle* coverage in Issues 203, 205 and 206.

Stockbridge residents who for years have envied the lifestyle of those using the **Canonmills Service Station** now rejoice in the opening of an M&S Simply Food at **48 Raeburn Pl**. Meanwhile, card shop Paper Tiger will soon roar into life at No. **106b**, while Whiskers Wine Bar at **No. 46** gives way to pizza restaurant Civerinos. Elsewhere, delectable smells in the old Ping On at **26-32 Deanhaugh St** will be replaced by mouth-watering pongs in enoteca and trattoria Sotto this autumn.

Windy city: **Leith Central Community Council** says proposals by Danish manufacturer Vestas to produce turbine blades in Leith docks could have negative consequences. The **welcome new 1k jobs**, attracting workers from outwith Edinburgh poorly served by public transport, might result in **unwelcome commuter traffic** through the area day and night. LCCC therefore calls for bespoke park-and-ride shuttle-bus services between **Midlothian and Leith** to form part of conditions attached to any future Planning consent.

Elected members on the **Culture & Communities Cmte** last month voted 8:2 to continue allowing dogs on leads to be walked in the city's **43 cemeteries and graveyards**. Council officers will monitor 5 locations, including **Warriston**, where uncontrolled dogs have caused problems in recent years.

Solicitor turned 'transport brigadier' **Hannah Ross** is leaving her post as Edinburgh Council's Head of Major Projects and Commissioning [bit.ly/Rossloss]. One **well-placed local** we've spoken to regrets the departure, describing her as 'knowledgeable, competent, well organised and with good personal skills': high praise indeed from a hard-to-please engager with the **Trams to Newhaven** project. On 30 Sept she starts work as Chief Executive of Scottish Govt-owned **Scottish Rail Holdings**, responsible for ScotRail and Caledonian Sleeper. We wish her well.

Rumours abound that Lothian Buses may consider rerouting some services along **Green St** to avoid overuse of **E London St**. We'll report back if and when we hear more.

St Philip's Scottish Episcopal Church at **12 Logie Green Rd** has listed building consent for various changes. These comprise some **internal reconfiguration**, additional partitions on the first floor, new glazing and external signage and lighting. St Philip's must now seek planning permission.

Scotland captured, bleak and beautiful

Claremont resident Ian Bowie has been named overall Scottish Landscape Photographer of the Year 2024. In this 10th year of the competition, Bowie's images were judged the best portfolio out of 4,000 entrants. He also won in the Environmental category.

Bowie says he was thrilled and honoured by the awards. 'This recognition holds a special place in my heart as it highlights the absolute best of the Scottish landscape and those that capture the single moment in time. This competition has been a profound source of inspiration for me and the images I capture.'

He described the competition as 'a great showcase for all the talented photographers that drive through the night, brave the icy cold mornings, the midgies and the boggy feet to bring us all these amazing images'.

You can see some of his award-winning portfolio on our website from 1 Sept onwards [bit.ly/SpBrkNws], and others at [bit.ly/sploty2024] and [bit.ly/ibowphoto].



Bin there, done that

Local resident David Lowenfels is a man on a mission. He hates litter and on daily walks always takes with him a carrier bag to collect offending trash.

Recently, though, he was further incentivised by joining LitterLotto, a phone app which rewards those who photograph themselves binning street rubbish with the chance to win a weekly cash jackpot.

So enthused was Lowenfels by the addictive charms of gamed good citizenship that he found himself collecting hundreds of items per week and for 2 days in mid-July was the most prolific LitterLotto litter picker in the UK.

And then the realisation struck: Despite all his efforts, he had never come close to winning a jackpot. Today, he continues to collect rubbish in and around the barony but is no longer signed up to the app. 'The dopamine hit', he observes ruefully, 'has now worn off'.



Trouble in store for OMNivores

Edinburgh Street Food's application to attach a temporary 9m² vinyl advertisement to the south-facing glass façade of the OMNi Centre has been refused (24/02706/ADV). Meanwhile, its illuminated freestanding signage, which was refused permission in Apr 2023 (as was a later appeal), remains in place and the alternative site for it, consented in Jan 2024, is unoccupied. This, and the alleged unauthorised development of a container, van and trailer within the premises' external seating area are the subjects of a separate Enforcement case pending consideration (24/00204/EOPDEV).



Student homes on shaky ground

A fall in the number of international students coming to Scotland again highlights the precarious business model of purpose-built student accommodation in Edinburgh.

Some 84k of Scotland's 292k students came from abroad in 2022/23. But, as an example, the *Scotsman* revealed in June that overseas students enrolling for postgraduate courses here had fallen by 20% in the 2023/24 academic year. Over the same period, Edinburgh Uni was among many HE institutions across the UK which failed to meet overall recruitment targets.

PBSAs rely on student rents during term time. Being in large part dependent on overseas students, they are vulnerable to global economic trends, international tensions, reputational changes and uncertainty about visa restrictions on family members and postgraduate residence. Such effects reverberate in the capital, where Edinburgh Uni has the highest concentration of overseas students of any Scottish institution (*Complete University Guide*).

If the PBSA model fails, that could force their management operators to seek other kinds of short-term tenant for year-round occupation. The most obvious source in Edinburgh would be tourists, who already occupy the buildings outwith term time.

For many developers, PBSA schemes are a pragmatic response to a lucrative financial opportunity. They do not represent a long-term investment in the needs and aspirations of settled communities surrounding them. As has long been pointed out, PBSAs are not built to a standard suitable for long-term habitation by permanent residents. So this particular cloud of falling student numbers does not offer a silver lining for Edinburgh's housing crisis.

Spurtleshire contains, or may soon contain, PBSAs at: Beaverbank Pl (x2), Dunedin St (x2), Eyre Pl, Haddington Pl, McDonald Rd, Montgomery St, Pilrig Heights and Shrubhill.



Local emissions fuel conversation

Interesting debate (some of it involving locals) unfolded on social-media platform X last month concerning Edinburgh's Low Emission Zone.

The Council described its LEZ, which began on 1 June, as 'a public health measure designed to improve air quality and reduce greenhouse gases' by discouraging the most polluting vehicles from entering the city centre. @Hollodge pointed out that NO² in vehicle exhausts is not a greenhouse gas.

@JohnfaeScotland noted that only one roadside monitor exists within the LEZ, and it will be 2 years before figures can establish whether air quality here has improved. @Hollodge replied that monitors have been installed as part of separate Air Quality Management Areas, and the Council is not required by the Scottish Govt to justify the LEZ based on figures derived from them.

Some have argued that non-compliant vehicles should be charged for entering the LEZ as in London. But @danc00kson said the Scottish Govt had legislated for an exclusion not a charging zone, and over 70% of fines in London had not been paid.

@RHLPrice2 said, 'The issue with this approach (penalty vs exclusion) is that it allows those who can afford it to "pollute" – such that the scheme becomes a Council revenue stream primarily (similar to London) rather than improving air quality within the LEZ.'



Briefly



Image: Billy Hicks, Wikimedia Commons.

The Council's consultation on possible introduction of **Firework Control Zones** closed on 23 Aug. If restrictive measures were adopted, 'certain fireworks' could be banned from Balerno, **Calton Hill**, Niddrie, Seafield and citywide. Formal, organised displays (e.g. after the Tattoo) would not be affected.

From Tattie Shaws to natty claws ... Shine My Nails has filled the space vacated by Broughton's most popular greengrocery at **35 Elm Row**.

On 29 July, for the second time this year, Irene Ross witnessed a car turning left from Drummond Pl which hit a car leaving a parking space on the left-hand side of **London St**. She remarks that if changes to the kerb layout (identified by the Council in 2012) had been implemented, cars would have to **reduce speed at the turn** and could therefore stop before any collision. 'I am deeply concerned,' she says, 'that there will be a casualty or fatality before any action is taken.'

Independent family-run Bistro Coco has opened at **32B Broughton St**, former home of the romantic Educated Flea. Its website promises a '**farm to plate ethos**' and French wines in a relaxed, intimate setting: [bit.ly/eat-coco].

As reported in Issue 333 (Oct 2023), the Council is reducing **glyphosate-based herbicide use** except for invasive species. Increased use of less dangerous alternatives and mechanical sweeping are being phased in instead. Officials concede that 2024 has been a **challenging year** with plant growth on some pavements reaching an unacceptable level due to warm weather and high rainfall. If **overgrown individuals or groups** can show sufficient commitment to 'self-weeding', officers will work with them to ensure no chemical treatments are applied.

As part of an '**administrative tidy-up**', the result of the recent boundary review for community councils entered a statutory Phase-3, 6-week consultation which ended on 21 Aug. Very minor, if any, adjustments will affect **Leith Central, New Town & Broughton, and Stockbridge and Inverleith CCs**. In theory, CC elections could take place this autumn. In practice, insiders reckon they are more likely to be held in early 2025.

An application to turn former sauna premises at **40 London St** into STL accommodation (23/06869/FULSTL) was withdrawn last month. The Council received 22 letters of support for the proposal from as far afield as **W Telferton, Craigentiny and Musselburgh**, most welcoming the potential boost for tourism and local jobs. Four immediate neighbours objected because of likely disruption, litter and anti-social behaviour from stag parties. Officials had been minded to refuse consent due to unacceptable impact on **residential amenity** for neighbours.

Campaign continues on core issues

The Canonmills Owners & Residents Assoc has been campaigning since this time last year about redevelopment of a narrow site on Eyre Pl to form 34 flats (Issue 328).

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

Legal advice received by the Council asserts that there is no case to answer. CORA disagrees and has approached the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman on various matters of principle.

In practical terms, the horse has long since bolted: the land has been sold, planning permission has been granted, and construction continues.

David Ritchie Watt (1927–2024): a personal appreciation

David Ritchie Watt, late of Bellevue Pl, died in July in Galashiels, where he had been living with his daughter. He was 97. Before his retirement, he was a director of Blair & Davidson, Printer and Stationer, at 10 Broughton Pl.

Watt had a mischievous wit and was a fund of stories about Edinburgh people and places, some of which he corroborated with tenacious attention to detail in the pages of the Broughton History Society's *Newsletter* [bit.ly/BHSocArchive]. He admired the unconventional Chief Constable William Merrilees and was an acute observer of local minutiae on his own foot patrols about Broughton. He was proud to honour the memory of great great grandfather Frederick Ritchie, pioneer of electric timekeeping and co-inventor of the original Time Ball and 1 o'clock gun signal mechanisms.

Watt, it can now be revealed, was for many years the crack-of-dawn phantom who tidied Drummond CHS playground unseen and unthanked, to the perplexity of teaching and janitorial staff. An early friend of the *Spurtle*, he was a long-time contributor and by far our oldest paperboy, scaling tenement stairs well into his 80s.

In 2014, Watt claimed that a recent knee operation was the only reason he had not represented Scotland as part of the nation's Commonwealth Games dominoes team. We have been unable to verify that claim. In active old age, he was a regular user of public libraries, which he visited, so he said, in order to scan newspaper obituaries and check whether he was still alive. Now that he isn't, he will be very fondly remembered by friends across the barony and beyond.—*Alan McIntosh*

NB: Over 300 images from Watt's family album, including the one shown here (dated 1944), appear along with further biographical details at Capital Collections [bit.ly/DRWalbum].



Moreover ...



Welcome to Turbo Burrito, the new Mexican restaurant and carry-out at **43 Broughton St**, resplendent in chimichanga-coloured red and yellow paintwork. Those finding the place via TikTok get a 20% discount. In recent years, No. 43 has been home to (in reverse order) Shinsen Sushi, The White Witch, Firth of Froth, Crolla's, the Scottish Refugee Council and the Citizens' Rights Office.

The newly constituted **Calton Hill Conservation Trust** was last month granted charitable status (see Issue 340).

We hear Edinburgh Council has no plans to sell for redevelopment its car-park BLT sandwiched between **Greenside Rd and Marshall's Ct**. It is open to public suggestions for how to use the space. Perhaps community growing on raised beds? Or a biodiverse urban meadow?

As *Spurtle* went to press, there had been no obvious increase in local tensions or violent disorder of the kind seen elsewhere in the UK this summer. If that should change, there are useful contacts for individuals, communities and businesses on the Council website at [www.edinburgh.gov.uk/communitysupport].

Transport & Environment officials will hold a workshop on 16 Sept to discuss with community-council representatives how best to consider residential amenity when **siting communal bin-hubs**. Better late than never.

Edinburgh World Heritage is about to circulate among stakeholders a 2nd draft Management Plan and governance arrangements. NTBCC chair **Peter Williamson** acknowledges the strong feelings of some in the area after Draft 1 (Issue 334) but calls for a **measured response** at this stage.

Testing of **real-time departure information** began on Lothian Buses stops in July. Once glitches have been sorted, the new system could start early this month, with **live disruption data** added by the end of Sept. An extra 95 travel-tracker sign locations are being assessed for suitability, taking into account factors such as the cost of each potential unit's power connections.

A pair of **peregrines** and their dependent eyes were frequent visitors to the old power-station chimney on **McDonald Rd** last month. These spectacular and cosmopolitan raptors are a welcome addition to Broughton's wildlife, unless, of course, you're a pigeon or a Pilgrim resident who doesn't thrill to repeated *e-chups* and *staccato kackings*. To *Spurtle's* dismay, the **'wandering falcons' had wandered off** before we managed to photograph them.

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<https://leithcentralcc.co.uk>

Ben Macpherson MSP

Member of the Scottish Parliament for Edinburgh Northern and Leith Constituency

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