

Five things you need to know today



Council plans to spend millions in Leith – Hogwarts in Barnton – Pilrig Park incident – Government says yes to same sex marriage – Edinburgh Jazz Festival today

A £5.5 million improvement programme is set to provide a vital boost for Leith Walk, the Council announced today.

The [plans](#) will be considered for approval by the Finance and Resources Committee on 31 July and include extensive road resurfacing, environmental improvements and the reinstallation of art work that was removed to accommodate tram works.

Utility works which were undertaken as part of the city's tram project will now be completed, following the decision to terminate the line at York Place.

Leith Walk and Constitution Street will benefit from resurfacing from Picardy Place Roundabout to Bernard Street Junction. London Road roundabout will also be reinstated with landscaping, as will traffic islands and pedestrian refuge islands.

Junctions and crossings are also to be upgraded if the plans are approved.

A number of environmental improvements are also included in the proposals, including additional soft landscaping, tree planting, and the replacement of broken paving on the footpaths.

Iconic art works and monuments will also make a welcome return to the area, including the Sherlock Holmes statue, the London Road Clock and the famous Pigeons.

Funding for the extensive programme has been identified from the Tram project budget (£2.3 million) and as a result of efficiencies in the Council's Capital programme (£3.2 million).

Stakeholders, including local residents and business owners, have taken part in discussions around the proposals. Their views are being considered and the schedule of works will be designed to minimise disruption based on the feedback.

Transport Convener, Councillor Lesley Hinds, said:- "This is the kind of boost that this important route needs and a vital investment in the area's future.

"Residents and businesses have been affected by the tram works so I think it's only fair that this iconic street is now returned to its former glory. This programme goes even further than that to provide environmental improvements such as landscaping and general upgrading that will provide a significant benefit for many years to come.

"We will continue to meet with members of the local community to make sure that our plans meet with their expectations and we will work with them to reduce disruption as far as possible."

A certain Dr Neil Murray has applied for a variety of planning permissions at a house on Whitehouse Road Barnton. This would not usually attract much attention except that he is JK Rowling's husband and part of the planning permission in question is to erect two freestanding structures which are already being called Hogwarts. We spoke to one of the neighbours who said that it would not really affect them as the playhouses will be on the other side of the garden, but they think that the tree houses look "fab" anyway. [STV online has more.](#)

An arrest warrant has now been issued as Lothian and Borders Police look to trace a 25-year-old man in connection with their enquiries into the serious assault of a woman in Edinburgh.

Detectives launched a major investigation after the 23-year-old victim was found with significant facial injuries in Pilrig Park at around 6am last Sunday 22 July.

Enquiries identified a man who is of interest to the investigation and are currently trying to establish his whereabouts.

At this time no other individuals are being sought. However the police say that anyone with information who can assist with the investigation but who is yet to come forward is asked to do so as soon as possible.

The Scottish Government intend to legislate to allow same sex marriage, it was announced today. However, legislation will be accompanied by important protections for freedom of speech and religion. As indicated in the consultation, no religious body will be compelled to conduct same sex marriages – protection for religious bodies who do not wish to conduct same sex marriages already exists under UK equality law.

Where a body does decide to conduct same sex marriages, the Scottish Government says it also intends – again, in line with the view expressed in the consultation – to protect individual celebrants who consider such ceremonies to be contrary to their faith.

To give certainty around this protection, they consider that an amendment to the UK Equality Act will be required, and they have said that they will work with the UK Government to secure

agreement to such an amendment before the formal introduction of a Bill to the Scottish Parliament and with a view to it being in place before the Bill comes into force.

A focused consultation with stakeholders will now take place to inform the drafting of legislation and guidance. It will consider any additional measures that may be required to guarantee freedom of speech and religion in specific circumstances, including education. As indicated in the consultation, a draft Bill will be published for consultation later in the year.

Deputy First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon said:

“The Scottish Government understands and respects the fact that there are very deeply held views in Scotland both for and against same sex marriage and, in coming to our decision, we have had to carefully consider a number of different factors. We are committed to a Scotland that is fair and equal and that is why we intend to proceed with plans to allow same sex marriage and religious ceremonies for civil partnerships. We believe that this is the right thing to do. We are also mindful of the fact that the leaders of all of the other parties represented in parliament support same sex marriage and that there is significant parliamentary support for legislation.

“However, we are also deeply committed to freedom of speech and religion. The concerns of those who do not favour same sex marriage require to be properly addressed. It is therefore right that the next step in this process will be to consult stakeholders on any provisions that may be required, in either statute or guidance, to protect these important principles and address specific concerns that have been expressed.

“The Scottish Government has already made clear that no religious body will be compelled to conduct same sex marriages and we reiterate that today. Such protection is provided for

under existing equality laws.

“However, our view is that to give certainty on protection for individual celebrants taking a different view from a religious body that does agree to conduct same sex marriages, an amendment will be required to the UK Equality Act. We will work with the UK Government to secure agreement to such an amendment before the formal introduction of a Bill to Parliament, with a view to it being in place before the legislation comes into force. A range of other concerns have also been expressed and we will take the opportunity to discuss with stakeholders what additional protections should be included, either in the legislation itself or in guidance, to address these.

“This will include consideration of any provisions that may be required to protect religious beliefs of teachers and parents in schools. We also intend to protect the current situation whereby the faith content of the curriculum in Catholic denominational schools is determined by the Scottish Catholic Education Service.

“Scotland is by no means the first and will not be the last country to legalise same sex marriage. However, as we proceed towards legislation, our overriding concern will be to respect the variety of views that exist on this issue and do whatever we can to address those concerns that have been expressed, while ensuring that Scotland lives up to its aspiration to be an equal and tolerant society.”

Scottish Greens today welcomed the announcement. However the Greens also urged the Government not to allow further delay while it lobbies for changes to UK equality law.

Patrick Harvie, Green MSP for Glasgow, said:-

“This decision sends the right message about Scotland as a society. Marriage has huge symbolic significance to many people, and should be available to all couples who want to

celebrate their love regardless of sexual orientation.

“It is also right that we protect religious freedom by allowing same-sex marriage in religious settings for the first time, something that the UK Government doesn’t seem ready to do. The writing is on the wall for those backward individuals who argue that same-sex relationships should be treated as second class.

“It’s clear that religious freedom can be protected and extended within existing equality law, and I would urge the Scottish Government not to delay progress until the changes they want are made by the UK Government. This issue has been on hold for too long already.”

Tonight the Edinburgh Jazz Festival Orchestra is conducted by Tim Hagans at the Queen’s Hall at 8.00p.m. More details on [how to book here.](#)