

## Eastbourne Councillor JIM MURRAY – Podcast 3 - PLANNING

CD: Hello and welcome to your Councillor Online and we are back again with Councillor Jim Murray from Eastbourne. How are you doing Jim?

JM: Good Afternoon, yes great to be back again.

CD: And it's great to see you again, brilliant. So we are here for your third podcast now and we are in a new environment. We are at the Enterprise Shopping Centre in our studios upstairs with all the fantastic boutiques and cafes and the Thai restaurant. Have you been in there?

JM: I've been in the Thai restaurant many a time and Yummy Noodles down the far end.

CD: Exactly.

JM: Another one of my favourites.

CD: Yeah, yeah oh no I need to keep away from all of that fortunately I've managed to do so, so far, but anyway if you hear some background noise it's just all the shoppers and revellers just enjoying themselves here. It's part of the atmosphere of being in the middle of Eastbourne which is fantastic.

JM: Sunniest place in the UK!

CD: Yeah, see exactly! Especially today luckily. So we are here today with Councillor Murray and we are going to be talking about planning. Now we put this out onto Facebook and Twitter a week or so ago asking for questions from people who wanted to know more about planning and you know how it effects the town. Why do the people have to actually apply for planning permission to change their houses or their shops or anything else like that? Now Jim, tell us why this is of special interest to you?

JM: Well my background is carpentry and I've been a carpenter since I've left school. 10 days' holiday and went straight into carpentry apprenticeship and since then I've built up my own company, then went into project planning and project management and have a real interest in architecture as well and have a big eco head on me as well so when I'm looking to build houses or look at houses I'm looking to try and build homes rather than houses. Proper sustainable developments if possible.

CD: Well yes and that makes sense. From a work point of view, you are involved with that on a daily basis. The building of the houses and working with architects I guess to make sure that everything works out well and as you say building a home rather than just a house, make it nice and decent. But for the town you have also got some special responsibility.

JM: Yes, as Chair of Planning we have 12 meetings year. In those meetings we have anything between two or three properties come up and 10 and 11 properties come up. I think the most we have ever had is 17 in one evening. It all depends how many applications come through at that particular time of the year. We have to deal with all of them within an eight week period to get them into actual committee stage so therefore that's why they tend to back up sometimes. So if we only have three coming through then that's fantastic but if we have 13 coming through they have to go into committee as well. We can't put some off until next month when we know it's going to be a bit quieter.

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- CD: Ahh right because of the time limit. Okay well if you don't mind some of the questions actually involve that sort of thing in other words trying to figure out how, why and how the Planning Committee and the process works but maybe you could tell our listeners why it works? I mean why is there a planning requirement? Why do people have to come along to you and say I want to put an extension on my house or I want to change the windows? Can you explain why this exists?
- JM: The changing of windows, cutting trees down, all sorts of different things. The idea is that Great Britain has 65 million, 67 million people now living in the country and we have got limited space so the planning is there to control the amount of sprawl into our green spaces and once we set a style for that particular town, what we are trying to do is we are trying to stick with that style throughout the town as much as we possibly can. Obviously moving with the times which makes it all very interesting but the main thing is so we don't go too far into the green countryside and end up with a bit of higgledy-piggledy mess.
- CD: Okay alright because I've travelled quite a bit in America and Canada and there doesn't seem to be any requirements for planning whatsoever over there. You know you can walk down the street and every single house will be completely different to the next house and they always remark when they come over here how similar our streets are. And I guess Harry Potter, do you remember that at the beginning when they show where he's been living with his uncle and aunt or whatever and all the houses look the same and everyone's got a Ford, not an Escort, a Focus and everyone is washing their Ford Focus in the mornings. How similar things are, sort of estates are like that but over there they don't have that. Any ideas why?
- JM: There's a couple of reasons. If I take you back to France. France is a good example because France has about the same population 65 million people but twice the amount of space for it. So they can sprawl a little bit more but the big difference between France and England is that England has national companies that will build all over the country so think of people like Persimmons, Wimpeys, Taylor Woodrow. They will build all over the country and they will build a certain style of house using certain materials because they can buy those materials in bulk, it makes it a little bit cheaper for them to actually build. In France you don't get that. You have individual counties and individual areas which are managed by the Mayor. So the Mayor has control in those particular areas. You go to the Mayor to ask permission as to whether or not you can build a house and if he likes the style of your house then you get to build it. And because there is so much more space over there you get a very much more individual sort of type of build. And you use the local materials, so if you go to somewhere like Normandy which hasn't got very many trees, they build with mud and straw and you go into the central part of France, where there is a lot more trees and they build in timber, so you see the traditional type of timber tudor type buildings that we see in this country and you go down south and they build in another style of building over there. And it's fairly similar in America. I think America have huge amounts of timber so all the houses are built in timber and they can build anywhere they like because they have got so much space.
- CD: Well there we go. Now we know something new. That's fantastic. I didn't realise that of course but I just thought you know that France likes regional stuff and that's it. But of course

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it makes sense doesn't it. There's no point moving material to and from such a large country all the time. Oh right okay so historically then we have kept a kind of design or a plan I guess for our towns and cities we have kept to. There is a technical term for this isn't there, an area development plan or something like that?

JM: Yes, yes, yes. So each individual town has to come up with their own plan which they present to Central Government telling the Central Government how many houses they are going to build in the next 5,10, 15 years and then Central Government comes back and tells you yes, no, that's acceptable or no you are not building enough, we need to build more houses. So Eastbourne for example needs to build 500 houses a year. We are only building about 150 houses a year mainly because the developers haven't got the space in Eastbourne to be able to build everything that we want them to be able to build and we are resistant or have been resistant to go up too high. So the multi-storey blocks of flats you might see in other towns, in the past we have resisted those. They have just started to creep in now sort of four or five storeys because we are at that point now where we are having to sort of look at that type of building to be able to get to that level of builds that we need to be able to do to keep the Government happy.

CD: Of course because a flat is a home so that counts towards the targets that they set. Yeah its interesting especially I guess with Eastbourne as well because of the historic kind of plan that was put in place when Eastbourne was put together. I did some research on Eastbourne and apparently it was the Duke of Devonshire wasn't it?

JM: Yep.

CD: Thank you good, phew. That's an A. So Duke of Devonshire who decided the way that the town would be laid out and I guess that puts a lot of restrictions because a lot of the housing stock was built kind of at the same time? Is that right?

JM: If you stand on Eastbourne Pier and look back into the town everything to the left is the big hotels and the grand houses, everything to the right is the not quite so big hotels and not quite so grand houses and that was the style of the town sort of formulated very roughly by the Duke. It started in 1835 with about four hotels and it expanded from that point so up until that point there was very little building works going on in the town. A very new town Eastbourne yeah.

CD: Obviously at the Enterprise Centre here we are quite close by to the train station and that's even newer isn't it because of course there was only a Spur line and there was some hassle to try and get it extended from Polegate I think it was years ago.

JM: Yes.

CD: Obviously years ago. So I mean that...

JM: And that's why we have got the Hampden Park busiest train crossing in Europe because trains have to come in through Hampden Park and then go back out again before they can get back on the main line again.

CD: Listeners if you could see him, he's basically shaking his fist and going grrrrr because of the amount of hassle that crossing does cause but anyway we covered that on a different

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podcast didn't we so let's not go back there again. But yeah so that's quite an interesting way of looking at planning. So in other words somebody says, I want to build a town or I'm going to, or however it works, basically I'm going to build a town, I'm going to look up from here and everything on the left is going to be grand, everything on the right seems like all the workers who are going to be working on that side of the town, that's where they are all going to live. So it's quite a demarcation there isn't there.

JM: Which you could of got away with in 1835. I don't think you would get away with that these days.

CD: No, no. Except of course and this is my own point of view, you can see some developers trying to do that of course with affordable housing.

JM: Yes. One of the big things about affordable housing is that affordable housing should be built within the existing housing stock. If you have got to build 60 houses we would ask you to build 20 of those as being affordable. So there shouldn't be a difference between one type of house and the other type of house and it should all be within the same development.

CD: Oh okay. I think most people assume that they are made of lower quality materials, they are not designed as nicely and they are pretty much made of paper.

JM: No, that's not the case. Everything has to come up to a certain standard. Planning decides on the design and location of the building. Building Control which is run by the Council, they decide on the quality and make sure that the house isn't going to fall down around your ears.

CD: Okay the technical side of it.

JM: Yes. So Building Control control that side of things, planning just decides on, we are like the architects and the Building Control are the actual builders.

CD: Okay I get it so in other words making sure the electricity is up to standard or code or whatever it is called over here to make sure that it works properly. Okay. Now another point I'll just make quickly on the Planning Committee is that if anyone is actually interested in learning more about how the Committee works we have already got at least one video cast that we did of your Planning Committee where we were there filming it live for you and so that's actually on the website as well so just look for that under Jim Murray. Because it's fascinating really to see how it works and to see how people come in with their applications. Now I've got some questions obviously that listeners have sent in. One of them which I think will tie in quite nicely with that is, I'll get there in a second, is will my planning application automatically be heard at a committee meeting? Now guys if you look at the video you will see that there is a committee of people sitting around discussing applications so will every application be heard by your committee?

JM: So we have a committee meeting once a month. We have between 80 and 120 applications per month come in for planning so no it won't be.

[laughs]

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Quite a lot of those applications might be 'I want to erect a fence at the bottom of my garden or I want to cut down the tree at the bottom of my garden'. All of that has to go through planning but the bigger developments, so if you are building two or three houses or a large extension on your house then that could possibly come to Committee. It all depends on if there is any objections and you can also insist on it coming to Committee yourself if you ask for it. If you ask for it to come to Committee, then we will bring it to Committee.

CD: Right because this comes under something about devolved powers so in other words officers at the Council are allowed to make decisions based on criteria and if it falls outside of that criteria then it comes to the Committee?

JM: Delegated powers yes.

CD: Sorry delegated.

JM: So most planning issues go through delegated which is the officers. I have sight of all of those so I do check them all just to make sure that they are not trying to get anything past the Councillors who are the elected members of the Council. But we have got a very good Planning Committee in Eastbourne and I think I have only ever called in perhaps one or two that I've thought well perhaps we might want to bring that one to Committee just to give people the chance to voice their concerns.

CD: Right so it depends on whether there has been any complaints, sorry not complaints, excuse me, disputes. Depends on whether there has been any disputes because of course a planning application has to be publicly displayed, we have all seen that, you know tacked up on a telegraph pole or something like that, or in the newspaper nowadays?

JM: It has to go to the newspaper. It has to go up on a pole. We tend to put something out on the radio. It might only go out once. The problem we have at the moment is that Government are trying to increase the amount of building works that are going on because a good way of boosting or stimulating the economy is to make sure the builders are working. There are two million of them. They get paid at the end of every week and they go out and spend all their money so that money goes straight back into the economy so it's a very good way of sort of stimulating the economy. And so what the Government is trying to do is they are trying to make planning easier for you to do, so you can now extend out the back of your house single storey up to 8 metres and the full width of your house which is an immense amount of space. It's almost doubling the floor space and all you have to do is you have to ask your immediate neighbours, so a letter will go out to your immediate neighbours asking them if they have got any problems. If they come back and say no, you can build it, you know whereas before you would have had to go for full planning permission for that sort of development.

CD: Was it something like two metres beforehand?

JM: Two or three metres yes very much smaller.

CD: Which is why all of the conservatories are about the same size?

JM: Yes.

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- CD: Right okay oh that's interesting isn't it. Okay and on that note let's go for some music.
- CD: And welcome back. Let's hope you enjoyed that. So let's talk about the delegated powers that the Council Officers have. Now do they come to you sometimes and say listen this thing just cannot go through, there is absolutely no chance, I'm going to send it to Committee. Can they make a recommendation themselves or.....?
- JM: Yes, definitely because obviously I don't get to see every single piece of paperwork that comes through before them so something which we think might not be a particular problem, a two storey extension on the back of somebody's house, we think will go through nice and easily. There's no problems with it, we've done 100 of them before but we might have three or four neighbours in that particular area who absolutely detest it and think it's going to be overshadowing or overlooking their property, they complain so therefore we will then bring it to Committee.
- CD: Okay alright. That's another good point that you've just brought up about overshadowing. Now I take it that there's been lots of complaints about trees and what have you. Does that come under planning at all?
- JM: Trees does come under planning. We have a TPO which we stick on a number of trees around the town. So if you see a tree on the corner of a road in a prominent position it's normally got a Tree Preservation Order on it, TPO. This stops people from just cutting it down because it's blocking their light or blocking their tv sets. Because it changes the entire feel of the town. The idea of Eastbourne is that we are a sustainable town. We have tried to make it as green as possible. We are trying to give it that green feel. For example, we have planted £350,000 worth of trees in the last five years in the town. I know that a lot of people are complaining about the fact that we have been cutting a lot of trees down mainly in the roads but we have been replacing them I promise you. When a tree gets to a certain point where it's damaging the infrastructure of the town then unfortunately it's got to come down but we will do as an absolute last resort.
- CD: Yeah I mean my dad lives somewhere and the pavement just up the road from him has got a tree, you know trees growing out on the side verge or whatever you call it. But this particular tree not only is it taking up its side verge place, you know with the grass and everything else but it's actually growing out and taking up half of the pavement as well. And it has done that for quite some time because it's quite an old-ish tree. Funnily enough on a corner so that's probably why it hasn't been cut down then because it's got the TPO on it.
- JM: Yeah.
- CD: Because it's a landmark I guess or whatever. But don't get me wrong, it's nature so we don't really want to chop it down for the sake of it do we.
- JM: No.
- CD: Just to beautify something.
- JM: Or not beautify it, as the case normally is.

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- CD: Well that's true. Mind you the summer's coming and I've got a tree in my garden that's a bit tall.
- JM: You can apply for having it topped.
- CD: Yeah.
- JM: So you can get the top 10 metres cut off but normally if it's got a TPO on it we would say no to cutting it down completely.
- CD: Right okay exactly. So that's difficult then isn't it when something has grown which actually impinges or impedes people's progress on a pavement and you can't really do anything about it but I suppose if it causes danger that's a different matter isn't it?
- JM: Once it gets to a certain state then we have to make the decision to lose it.
- CD: Yeah obviously he doesn't live in Eastbourne and I'm sure that that doesn't happen but yeah in this particular place it's quite interesting to see. Okay so we've covered the Planning Committees and whether or not applications automatically go to Committee or delegated powers covered it so that's great. Hopefully that's answered your question there Kelly Forsyth. So in the Committee that's happening and they are looking at things and they are looking at applications and you said sometimes you have 8, other times you have had 18 applications something like that, is there a time limit on the actual Committee? I mean you said that there is a time limit in terms of having to assess the application. I think you said earlier on two months or something?
- JM: Yeah we have got eight weeks from application to deciding whether or not it goes through. Deciding whether or not it goes through delegated or comes to Committee. So once it has got to that point then we are fairly close to making a decision but we have to decide within eight weeks what we are going to do with it.
- CD: Okay and then of course so say it takes seven weeks or whatever to look at an application and then you decide yes it has to go to Committee then you have to find that the Committee it can obviously fit into in terms of time so and sometimes you are going to run out of time.
- JM: Well what we do....
- CD: Sorry on a Committee meeting basis, I don't mean on an overall application.
- JM: So the Committee meeting starts at 6.00 and potentially we could run all night if we wanted to but we have a cut off time at 10.00 where we call a stop to proceedings and we will ask the full Committee whether or not they want to continue. So if we've still got another three or four hours of decisions to make because we've had a decision that took a long time earlier in the evening then they can either decide to adjourn it until the following month or continue on. Normally what happens is we have probably got another half an hour or an hour to go and we will continue to complete that particular agenda. The longest one we have had is 11.00 at night so we have gone from 6-11 and that was one with 18 items and 22 speakers.

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- CD: Wow see thank you. Can you imagine 22. Again listeners if you have a look at the video you will see that listeners are encouraged, sorry not listeners, sorry what did.....
- JM: Objectors or applicants.
- CD: That's it. Objectors or Applicants. I mean obviously an Objector is quite self explanatory and an Applicant I guess is someone who is coming along to explain a bit more about or you've called them or maybe asked them to explain a bit more about the application. And you can see that it can actually be quite busy. So have a look at the video people and you'll understand what goes on there. So I hope that answers your question there Mrs Collett. And talking of the Committee then, how is the membership of that Planning Committee sort of determined? Is it along party political lines or do people just apply to it? Is there any special reason why Councillors are on it?
- JM: The Planning Committee is one of the most strictly run legal entities within the Council so you have to be very careful about what to say and what guidance you give people and what advice and all those sort of things. It is one of the few Committees where you have a lawyer sitting next to you just to give you a prod if you say the wrong thing.
- CD: Oh really.
- JM: Which happens occasionally with me.  
[Laughs]
- CD: Well it's handy then isn't it really to make sure everything is above board.
- JM: So the whole point of the Planning Committee is that it's non-political so we will try and get a balance of members from both sides of the party. So at the moment we have got 27 members in Eastbourne, 19 of them. No it's not 19, its 18 are Lib Dems and 9 of them are Tories. But we still do a split where there are four Lib Dem Councillors and three Tory Councillors and we will do that every single week or every time that we come to Committee. There's the regular members who turn up every single month and occasionally if you are on holiday then you can't make it and we have people who are delegated to stand in for you. You cannot just be one of the Councillors and turn up because the other guy can't make it, you actually have to have had some training and you actually have to be delegate a nominated member to be part of the Planning Committee.
- CD: Right so everyone on the Committee is trained, has gone through some training to understand and to be appreciative of all sort of I guess building codes and regulations and planning regulations also so that they are not objecting or allowing things through that shouldn't happen. Obviously the lawyers are there too to make sure that everything is okay.
- JM: Yeah.
- CD: Oh right okay that's interesting. I'm sure a lot of people don't realise that either. They probably just think it's lay people but if you're relatively qualified that's good.

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- JM: And the Councillors there are not representing their wards so for example I might get one of my planning applications might come up in Hampden Park. I'm not there to represent that person from Hampden Park. If they want somebody to represent them from Hampden Park as a Councillor they have to ask one of the other Councillors from that ward, I'm there as a representative of the town as a planning member. So although we have where our wards are on stickers, we actually represent the town not the individual wards.
- CD: Yes, so you are doing a job for the town really rather than being anything to do with party political so really it should be the best people doing those particular roles. That's interesting. Again something else I didn't know. So here we go, the next question from Mark 'Are Councillors likely to accept applications that are more environmentally friendly if it matches with their party policy?'
- JM: Okay so we don't have a party policy but we will have a planning policy. So a planning policy is the thing that guides us so we will look to change that policy or adapt it to make it more up to date about every 7-8 years I believe and our next change is coming up in 2021. So we have got quite a bit of green policy within our statement at the moment but I am looking to sort of try and green that up with the support of the other members of the Committee. So we are looking to sort of try and insist on housing developments having 20% of their parking spaces being electric so that you can charge your cars from it. We are looking to sort of try and incorporate more green walls into developments, more planting. If they have got lots of car parking so if you have got your car parking which has got sort of perhaps 20 spaces, those little crosses in the middle make really good planting spots for trees you know rather than sort of having it as a waste space. So we are looking to sort of try and introduce rules like that making sure that the house is, like I say, becoming more of a home rather than a house, making sure that they are coming up to really good code standards. So at the moment the standard that most towns work to is code 3. We try and encourage our developers, we can't insist on it but we encourage them to work to code 4, which just means that the house is slightly warmer, you don't have to put so much energy into it to keep it warm. So therefore it's cheaper on the electric bills which takes people out of fuel poverty. So there's a huge amount of things which get effected by a decent planning policy and we have got a pretty good one at the moment but we are looking to sort of refresh that and make that more up to date for 2021. So anybody who has got any ideas of what they would like to see please do contact the radio station and let them know because I know of half a dozen, a dozen, two dozen different ideas that I'd like to incorporate but if I could incorporate another three dozen then I'm happy to do that as well.
- CD: Yeah exactly because you don't know which ones could be the best?
- JM: No.
- CD: That you haven't heard of yeah so get in touch with us here at Eastbourne.Online or on [yourcouncillor.online](http://yourcouncillor.online) and let us know and we can pass those onto you, that's no problem at all. So that's interesting as well because the electric cars, I hired one a few months ago and it was quite interesting because you know what they say about range anxiety which is what they call it right with an electric car. Oh my gosh, it's a real thing I tell you honestly, it is a real thing. Now where we are now outside Eastbourne Train Station there are some

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electricity charging points here in the car park which is great. That was very lucky for me it was when I hired the car for the week but there's very few actually. Supermarkets have so Morrisons, Waitrose, Asda, see I know them all right so and I'm not sure there's any on the seafront?

JM: No.

CD: No not yet but I know that there are government schemes aren't there to put those in?

JM: There is a government scheme to pay 75% of the cost of those so that puts them actually onto the street side. We are looking into seeing how we can do that within Eastbourne. Once again if we can get it into individual housing developments then that would be a good thing as well. And looking to try and sort of reintroduce it into as many sort of areas in the town as we possibly can.

CD: So let me ask a question and obviously personally biased here because I've had the experience of this right. So one thing that I think causes a lot of problems with these electric charging points is like for instance in a supermarket, where they place them tends to be really close to the entrance right which encourages people to park there who don't have electric vehicles. And so my mother-in-law when I took her to the supermarket had a massive row with this guy who decided that he was going to sit there and she's telling me 'just block him in' he shouldn't be there, but I said well actually you know it's not the law, right, not to park there. Pretty much like it's not the law not to park in a disabled bay or a mother in child bay in a private car park. It isn't is it?

JM: The individual shop normally has some enforcement policy so that they can go out there and ask somebody to move.

CD: But the Police won't come?

JM: The Police won't come along but most people are fairly sensible if you ask them politely. It sounds as though you have got a particularly arrogant guy but this is one of the things that we are trying to encourage. There's not that many electric cars out there at the moment because there's not that many charging points, because there's not many cars out there people decide well I can just park there, I'm not putting anybody out you know.

CD: No because it's empty.

JM: But now there's more cars coming through, more people actually use these spots so therefore we start to get some arguments which personally is a good thing because I know that there's more electric cars out there now you know and we are sort of starting to make a difference and by 2040 I think the Government are saying or 2050 that all cars are going to be electric.

CD: Which would be, I think, would be great. You know the car I had had excellent performance. It was fantastic. I really enjoyed it and I would seriously consider that for my next one barring the range anxiety issue but then you do have different types of chargers with different speeds of charging you know and then they cost more of course if you want to charge your car up in half an hour, you have to pay quite a lot more but it's not as expensive as putting petrol in it so you know that was good. You know I think this is one of things isn't

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it that people sort of don't think perhaps, again my own personal view, but when a supermarket puts it in and they put them close because they are not running the cables too far to the other side of the car park, it's probably just to keep the costs down isn't it you know.

JM: Yes, yeah, yeah, it's straightforward. You come straight out of the building and you have got a 5 metre cable or a 30 metre cable, which one are you going to use.

CD: I knew it. [laughs]

JM: I've been very lucky because of my sort of eco credentials I've managed to travel around Europe a little bit sort of looking at some of what the Europeans are doing. I went to the Netherlands and they had an electric bike over there which they were sort of trialling. This is five years ago but it did 0-60, it's an electric bike, 0-60 in 4 seconds.

CD: Wow.

JM: You know and 0-100 in 8. It was an amazing bike.

[Laughs]

CD: So that's an electric motor bike?

JM: An electric motor bike yeah.

CD: Right imagine that! Because of course we have got just a little plug here for one of my neighbours Easy Pedal Bikes just outside here that sell electric bikes, you know push bikes and things and they are going great guns and you see these electric bikes everywhere because I'm quite interested in everything to do with electricity in terms of using it as a power source. And I think the University of which I'm affiliated with, I'm a student there as well, a mature student, we also have something at the station I think and I'm not actually is that project still going or....

JM: Is it Go Bikes or something? Or Drop Bikes or something?

CD: Not the rental, yeah there's a rental bike like push bike normal one but there's also a closed system at Eastbourne Station that allows people to, obviously who are in the University of Brighton in Meads to get an electric bike from the station so that they can cycle up there and you know obviously it was a research project and all that sort of stuff so I don't know whether that's still going but it certainly was here.

JM: As far as I know it is yeah.

CD: Because it's a really good idea you know but then students tend to walk in groups together so you know so are they really going to use those bikes? 'See you later I'm off' you know sort of thing. 'See you later mate you know we're up there' but anyway so that's part of the plan obviously to help the green credentials of Eastbourne. That's one of the issues. Now you said that new developments, you want them, you can't require, I suppose you can require them to provide electricity or car charging points within their development schemes?

JM: If we make it as part of our policy then yes they have to.

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CD: Oh okay alright.

[Music]

CD: So you can choose, not you but the Council can choose to make that or whatever policy, helicopter pads on top of tall buildings, whatever.

JM: Yeah.

CD: Right okay. So one of the other questions is...

JM: But what would happen if we sort of over specified it, you know, we have got to strike that balance between attracting developers into the town and also being able to make it affordable for them as well.

CD: Well it's got to pay back hasn't it.

JM: Yeah, so I would love them to have all 100% of the houses with electric points outside but if you ask them to do that then it's just not achievable and they won't be able to build, they won't be able to make any profit so therefore they won't come to Eastbourne, they will go to Hastings, they will go to Brighton instead. At the moment we are a very desirable town to come to and to build into.

CD: Do you know that's a good point because business comes into it and I can guess if you have a house building company, you know looking to make it, they have to make a profit you know that's why companies are in business, so they are looking to maximise their profits and the easiest place to do that is where they can make the maximum amount of profits and still keep within local legislation. It's got to make sense. So you are competing with other towns?

JM: Yes.

CD: Hmmmm that's interesting. So in other words, sorry go on...

JM: One of the big things I personally hate is developers trying to squeeze far too many developments into a particular block. So it might be a block of flats which would have a sensible floor space for each one of the flats and that might be 20 flats but the developer wants to put 30 in there. That means that all of those individual flats become far too small. The person who has got to live in those buildings won't have a good lifestyle because they will be sort of feeling very cramped and so that sort of thing has to be taken into account as well. So because I've been Chair of Planning now for four years, the Planning Officers know that that's my big bug bear and they pass that information on to all of the developers. If you try and squeeze too many flats into this building it's just going to get thrown out and so that doesn't happen now in Eastbourne. Wherever we possibly can especially on new builds, if they try to squeeze too many flats into the development, it won't go through, it won't even come to planning because the officers know that we will throw it out at Committee level.

CD: Because you want to create homes? Not just units, not just houses?

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JM: Yeah. So that's a small difference that we can make. There are exceptions to it as always, there's a hotel that we have just passed planning permission for where they have changed it into flats rather than a hotel. Because it's an existing Victorian house with a staircase running up through the middle, they have struggled to be able to get the floor space that they possibly can but they have squeezed every square inch out of it that they can. There's plenty of light coming into the building and it's on the seafront. There's lots of other stuff going on around it that's going to make it still a nice house to be able to live in, a nice home to live in. You know so it's always sort of trying to strike that balance and that's one of the things that we have got to take into consideration with planning is that you take every single individual building on its own merit. What might work in one house won't work in another house and we might pass that one but we won't pass that one.

CD: But it's exactly the same.

JM: Yeah but it's in a different environment and you use different materials and you have got another house right next to you that is going to block all your light, you know so there's slight variations which make a difference to how we view each individual property.

CD: Right so okay, so another question which this was quite interesting in terms of history. So somebody was living in a house and the next door neighbour decided that they wanted to extend their house so say a two and a half storey house, in other words just one single room at the top, not a loft conversion but a room built there instead of a loft if you see what I mean. So originally it was a Victorian house and then what happened was the neighbour, was the neighbour next door decided that no, no, no they didn't want that, they wanted to extend that one single room across the back of the house, if you can imagine so it goes all the way back so this room was sort of at the front-ish kind of thing. Anyway did all that but didn't bother to get any planning permission, just did it right and for years and years and years there was a big issue about this and they have never been ordered to take it down. And I know you can't obviously not specific cases right I get that, it's not in Eastbourne anyway but how quickly would the Council come down, would you notice that happening if somebody decided to be so crazy to do that sort of thing, in other words a massive extension on a house without doing any consultations or whatever?

JM: It's one of the things that we have clamped down on in the last two or three years where we try and get the Officers out and one check on the developments that we have passed and make sure that they are actually doing what they said that they were going to be doing and not trying to squeeze an extra flat in or stick an extra dormer in on the back or something and we do encourage them to sort of keep an eye on what's going on in the town as well. That gets supported by the locals who will come to us and sort of say 'what's he doing, he's put a fence up or he's put a big extension on the back, is he allowed to do it?'. Unfortunately, quite a lot of this falls in under permitted development which means we have got no control over it whatsoever. It goes back to the Central Government again where they are trying to encourage more building work going on so quite a lot of loft conversions come under permitted development. So what you're talking about, as long as they didn't do anything with the front and they go out the back, that's permitted development there.

CD: Oh is it?

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JM: Yeah.

CD: Oh nowadays.

JM: On the whole. We have got one coming through at the moment where the, I'm trying to avoid sort of using trade terms and things but the very top of the house between the floor joists and the ridge is too low so they can't put a loft in there but they want to, so they have to lift the ridge up because if they didn't move that ridge they could just do it, they wouldn't need permission but because they have got to move that ridge up, they then have to apply for planning permission. So very small detail but it makes a big difference to the planning.

CD: Yeah well if it's making the house taller then yes okay I see what you mean. So as long as it doesn't overlook the street then you are talking about it may not need the planning permissions. Okay alright so that's interesting and I think that's probably, again the builders are happy with that then because there is a lot more work going on than there might be considering the way that austerity has hit and everything. No so that's cool then okay, so to end that story by the way, the neighbour was paid a fortune to sort of not complain any more.

JM: Yes.

CD: Right so which I thought was quite interesting. Money does get you some benefits.

JM: If it's permitted development then it's probably them deciding that they didn't want to sort of have this neighbour hassling them all the time. If it wasn't permitted development and they needed to go through the Council then the Council would of picked it up and taken it on because we don't want people going ahead and doing planning details that are not allowed and we will prosecute, challenge anybody that does that.

CD: Yeah I mean there's been some famous cases haven't there over the years? You know, elsewhere.

JM: And in Eastbourne.

CD: And in Eastbourne?

JM: Yes.

CD: Ohhhhh. Can you tell us about that?

JM: Everyone's aware of the problems that we have in the town.

CD: Okay alright no we don't want to go there or anything. So okay then. So I think we are coming to the end of our questions. Okay did I ask? Okay somebody called Claire asks, I don't know if I asked this earlier? 'What's the hardest or the type of application that's the hardest to get through the Council?'

JM: Ummm.

CD: And that's our final question and I'll let you think about that.

JM: The hardest one is anything which gets challenged I suppose.

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[Laughs]

CD: Yeah I suppose.

JM: It can be straightforward conservation but if you've applied to all the right people and gone through all the right channels then conservation is nice and easy to do as well. If you are building 100 houses and you are contributing to the town, it's something which we need and it's in the right area and it's the right development, then it's not a problem. But the main thing is probably people who draw something on the back of a fag packet and then present it to the Council and say we would like this please and then expect us to sort of fill in all the gaps and things for them.

CD: So something that's too vague then?

JM: Yeah. If you don't give us details, then we don't know what really you're talking about. We will offer help and that's something which we have changed over the last three or four years as well. Come to us discuss what you want to do, we will tell you whether or not it's viable for Eastbourne and give you some guidance on what is and isn't accepted within the town but we cannot start designing stuff for you.

CD: Oh no exactly. So that's good so it's not an [UNCLEAR 51.30] kind of affair is it? Right no, you're very much in partnership with people who want to develop. So that's interesting and that also, again through research, when you get a developer who comes along and wants to build a collection of houses or a big estate or something like that and then there is such a thing as, is it a section 106 deal or something like that?

JM: Well it used to be called a 106 money where they give us a contribution towards the infrastructure of the town. It has now moved over to be called [SILL?] money and don't ask me what it stands for but that's taken it over so we still get that contribution.

CD: Okay so that's interesting. Can you just explain that quickly?

JM: So for example, All Saints Church on the seafront, they have built a number of properties up there for private sale. They didn't want to do any affordable housing or social housing for us, which was one of the conditions that they would have had to do, because they were building I think 60 units. So out of those 60 units they would have had to build at least 15 of them to be social housing. They didn't want to do that so they gave us a contribution of £3 million instead and then that goes back into capital funding for the town to do various bits and pieces within the town.

CD: Oh right so that's not necessarily monies that need to be spent in that development then?

JM: No.

CD: Okay so it can be spent anywhere in the town?

JM: Yes. Council.

CD: Yeah right so that's really good then so something on one side of the town can benefit something on the other side of town quite easily because it goes into the central fund.

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JM: Think of the harbour at the moment, with the finishing touches that are happening over at the harbour at the moment, with the playground areas, the community centre, the doctor's surgery, those sort of things. Some of that money, if not all of that money for the community centre for example, has come out of 106 money.

CD: Oh okay that's good news then.

JM: So that all gets paid for by that.

CD: Oh right fantastic so that's good because I thought that was something like yeah if you build a massive estate, I don't know you are building 500 homes or something then you provide a school or something along those lines, but that's how it used to be? Or it can be still?

JM: It still is part of. If you're going to add that amount of extra houses into a town, you have got to think about the sewage system, you have got to think about the doctor's surgery, where are all the kids going to go to school, how you are going to get them to it from A to B, where is all the car parking going to go? So the infrastructure is immense. Can the power supply that's already accounted for within the town cope with another 500 houses?

CD: That's a good point. Yeah because obviously as a lay person, you just wouldn't think of that. You'd just think that's alright run an extension lead yeah.

[Laughs]

Yeah no, no okay so the first house I built was on a big estate. First house I bought rather was on a big estate that was a new one built by one of these housing developers, and see this is again where you are talking about how things have changed, and this was in the mid to late 90's. So what happened was we had a nice garden and of course nowadays things are being squeezed and squeezed and squeezed so you look at a new development in other places. I'm not saying Eastbourne but looking in other places, you know I've had family buy houses from a similar developer and they really are, as they say, a postage stamp type garden. It's not even a garden, it's a bit of turf really you know, that's about it. Because they are squeezing more and more plots into a larger space which is kind of upsetting really if you think about it but you're saying that Eastbourne obviously doesn't want that to happen?

JM: I don't want it to happen but...

Once again we come down to the individual cases. You know we've just passed planning permission for 50 flats in the town centre on the old Police Station site with no car parking whatsoever, so those people who move into there, we are looking to attract single parent families, young families, people who haven't got cars but people who will use the train station which is right next to them, the bus service which is right next to them. The free bus pass that they will be given for three years when they buy a flat, the free car share scheme that they'll be entitled to for a year, £100 cycle voucher that they'll be given when they buy the flat. You know because we are trying to think slightly outside the box. It sounds a little bit gimmicky. We are hoping it's going to work but we wouldn't do it on the outskirts of town because there is no infrastructure there to support them but because it's right in the town centre, everything's there for them. The bus service, the train service, access ability to anywhere else in the county really is on their doorstep. We think that in this particular case

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it's going to work and it gives us an extra 50 houses or flats should I say but they will be affordable flats as well. 20% of those are going to be affordable housing.

CD: Oh okay and that's just around the corner here?

JM: That's just around the corner here.

CD: Well you see I think from my own point of view, it makes some sense. You know if you're going to be in the centre of town, do you need a vehicle? I know that obviously, you know, people do have vehicles. I'm again talking about my own experience. I lived in Brighton & Hove for years and I lived in the centre of Hove. There was never any parking there, you know, because all those massive houses are all turned into flats and so parking is a real issue and when I moved there, I probably lived in Hove for about five years and I did not have a car for five years because there was no point. It was just more hassle than it was worth, funnily enough, if I needed a car I went and rented it, which is what you're saying. Which is interesting and it's nice to see that I think that those sorts of things are being thought of.

Okay Jim, I think we have run out of time now to be honest. I think we have really gone through a lot today. I'm going to have to listen back and try and remember what it is but let me just have a quick look at the questions but in the meantime, is there anything else that you'd like to say about planning and about your role perhaps?

JM: Ummm planning is one of those ones which you love or hate. I'm one of the lucky Councillors who loves doing it, so I'm enjoying my time on the Council. I'm also really interested in sort of eco work as well so hopefully the next time that we get to talk we can talk about some of the sort of greening up of Eastbourne that we are hoping to be doing in the future.

CD: Absolutely. Brilliant. Well Councillor Jim Murray from Hampden Park and the Lib Dems. Thank you very much for coming into Your Councillor Online and obviously Eastbourne Online as well. Again listeners if you have got any questions for Councillor Jim, let us know and we'll pass them on for you so, you'll be happy to answer those I guess won't you?

JM: No problem.

CD: Excellent okay and then hopefully we will be speaking to you soon about how to green up Eastbourne and how the Council are looking to do that.

Thanks very much for joining us, see you later, bye.