

Speaking to Daniel Johnson MSP

I went to meet Daniel Johnson MSP to catch up with him about what is on the agenda for him or his constituents in Edinburgh Southern.

His constituency office is in Comiston Road in a parade of shops. He likes being in the area. He explained : “There is a strong sense of community in South Edinburgh. We have one of the last functioning high streets in Bruntsfield and Morningside. That is a rarity and is something that makes this place very special.”



Daniel Johnson MSP

We talked about the parking charges being imposed by the council in the area and how that might impact on local businesses as well as business rates. He told us that some businesses which used to benefit from the small business bonus scheme will face large increases in payments. He explained : "All of these things are important because independent businesses are the lifeblood of any local high street, and this can take them from being viable to not viable. I think we have to look at things like business rates and parking charges very carefully before those changes happen."

Daniel's parliamentary business includes dealing with the Planning (Scotland) Bill which is at Stage 2 at Holyrood, and that is an area where he feels he can make a difference.

He admits it can look very dry and boring at first but people are very interested as the decisions can have big and longterm consequences for communities.

He said : "Here in South Edinburgh we have some pretty big examples where the decisions have not gone along the lines of what the community wanted or have gone completely against them. We have Craighouse, the Sick Kids and now we have the prospect of the Astley Ainslie site right in the middle of my constituency. It is a 45 acre site – very green and very leafy. So I think getting these decisions right is so important."

Levels of student housing and community involvement in planning decisions are also matters which he talked to me about and you can listen to the full interview below.

He is particularly concerned about the size of the student accommodation. He believes what is being built can only ever be used for students, whereas if they were built as houses or flats in the ordinary sense they could be used as student flats (but not the other way round). There are many large flats in Morningside or Marchmont which housed large families

at first but have latterly become Houses of Multiple Occupancy for students. He is not certain that the council's planning committee is getting it right yet.

With regard to the planning bill he feels that the government has been taken by surprise on the interest in it. He also feels that there are more amendments than there might have been and this could have been avoided with some cross party discussion ahead of the bill being presented. He explained : "The reality is that local communities know how important planning is.