



If you're going to have intensification, you have to have really locally engaged local government.

# Joel Cayford

Joel approaches issues of transport, infrastructural development and urban planning in a very practical way. He has combined his understanding of the need for community engagement with a practical science-based wisdom, which he applies when considering the practicalities of furthering community growth and development. Joel has lived on the North Shore for nearly 30 years, and in that time he has brought initiative and drive to his participation in community activism, along with his passion for issues-based film-making. His political career at both a national and local level has at times been fraught, but also rewarding.

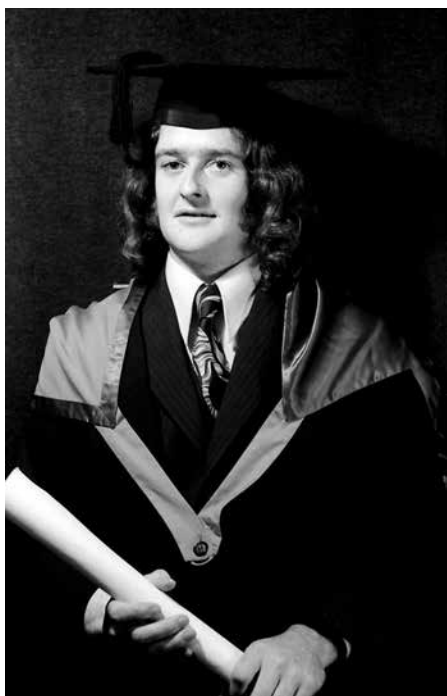
With a doctorate in Computational Atomic Physics, Joel first worked by applying his skills in computer programming in the area of military defence systems. However, in the mid-1970s in London, he became politicised through the union movement, film-making and by his friends, which led him to have an about-face moment.

He turned his attention away from the defence and petrochemical industry towards social and community actions, demanding the need for sustainability, quality urban development, and peaceful conflict resolution. Armed with his video camera, and a wider social conscience, he worked with a number of community activist groups, first in the United Kingdom and continuing to do so after his return to New Zealand in 1991. He has made a number of films that cover issues to do with mining, water, unionism, new technology and nuclear disarmament.

Joel is one of six children. He was brought up in Oamaru where he attended Waitaki Boys High School. Joel was keen on science as

a boy and did well in chemistry, physics and maths at school. He was dux at Waitaki Boys High, *which wasn't really a very socially successful thing to be. You needed to be in the first XV to be socially successful in Oamaru.* He then went to Canterbury University to study physics; he graduated with a PhD in Atomic Physics in 1976.

That same year he left for London. He worked as a fitter in a car repair garage in Shepherds Bush for a few months. *I wasn't a real motor mechanic, but I could undo things and do things up because I had grown up with a mechanical father.* Reading the paper one Sunday, he saw an advertisement by Marconi Space Defence Systems looking for finite element computer modellers to model anti-submarine torpedo technology. *My PhD had been finite element modelling, so I answered the ad.* He knew the Fortran programming language that was necessary to do the work and got the job, using large mainframe computers. The project he first worked on was converting a program written by Marconi and



*Graduation, BSc Hons in Physics, 1973*



*On holiday in France, 1983*



*With his MkVII Jaguar, Canterbury, 1975*

changing it for computer use at Scicon—a scientific consulting company owned by BP, which specialised in military systems analysis for the UK Ministry of Defence. *It was very satisfying, very detailed but because I was used to the detail of very large computer programs, I got the job done in just a few days. They had expected it would be a few weeks or a few months.*

Joel says, at the time, his most interesting job at Scicon was for Hollandse Signaalapparaten, a Dutch-based organisation that designed on-board intelligence, radar surveillance and defence systems for the Indonesian Navy. *It was incredibly interesting work, but quite a few of my friends were saying, 'Why are you working on these military projects?' After a couple of years I switched to working for Shell International. Was that any better? I got these jobs through physics and computing. I didn't know much about anything else. At the time, for me, nuclear power was the best thing since sliced bread, so I was an absolute convert and I hadn't questioned any of this. A few*

years later, because of his computer programming skills, Joel got a job investigating a computer model of how the United Kingdom could deal with the waste from its nuclear power plants. It proved to be *really personally transformative* for Joel. As part of his work, he interviewed an engineer who had been involved in similar work in the United States. The engineer said he was designing a sign meant to last 50,000 years that would tell people not to dig in the area because nuclear waste was buried there. The waste would be buried in a Native American reservation. *I was still this physicist who was thinking that nuclear power is kind of fantastic, and it was that conversation that transformed me. I was thinking, 'Are you part of the solution here, or are you part of the problem?' It was the practical realities around having nuclear waste that's dangerous to the biosphere for 50,000 years that really concerned me.*

Around the same time, Joel became interested in film-making. At the end of his third year in London, he made his first film, *The*

*Umbrella Movie* (1979). I was interested in surrealism in the cinema. I had these animated umbrellas, and the idea was that coloured umbrellas were the flowers and black umbrellas were the weeds. One of my friends was the gardener in Hampstead Heath. He dug out the black ones and left the coloured ones. The umbrellas became angry when they were treated this way, so they became like spears flying.

His second film, *Lorette* (1980), was chosen for the short film category of the New Zealand Film Festival and was shown on television here on the Kaleidoscope programme. It centred around a West Coast New Zealand relationship. *It was pretty dark.*

Although he enjoyed his work as a computer modelling contractor, Joel decided that he wanted a career in film-making, and went to work for EPIC, (Eric Parsloe Industrial Communications), in 1981. His boss, Mr Parsloe, had become interested in what was then called interactive video. The first major project that Joel worked on at EPIC was for IBM. The company had only just started dipping their toes in the personal computer market. IBM wanted to show small business owners what a computer might do for them, and wanted an interactive video to demonstrate the possibilities in retail stores across Europe. It involved touch-screen technology, and was *way ahead of its time. It had to persuade them that a personal computer, a PC, was a useful thing for word processing, spreadsheets and filing.*

Joel recalls that he was getting more politicised by the day. He joined the Labour Party in Britain in the early 1980s and became involved in making campaigning videos on subjects such as nuclear power, nuclear weapons and human rights. The videos were distributed to secondary schools throughout the country through *Team Video*, a company he established with friends, while he was working at EPIC.

Around this time, he became involved in a relationship with Jan, whom he had met at EPIC. Their two elder children were born in England in 1987 and 1989. In 1991, the family relocated to New Zealand. They rented for a couple of years before buying



*Image used in Joel's election campaign brochure. Joel and daughters, Scarlett, Maddy and Emily, on Narrow Neck Beach, 1998*

a house in Ngataringa Road in Devonport. Joel set up a subsidiary of the British company, and called it *Team Video Pacific*. He brought out the British titles that he thought would be applicable in New Zealand and Australia. *I did two productions when I came here. The first one was for Coromandel Peninsula Watchdog about mining Mining and the Environment (1992). And another one for Greenpeace, called Sink to Sea (1993), about water pollution in New Zealand. I was the cameraman, editor, chief cook and bottle washer.* That same year, he joined the Green Party and stood in the general election as the Alliance candidate for the North Shore electorate. He says the videos he had made had motivated him to join the Greens.

His first hands-on involvement in New Zealand community activism began in 1992. The Navy began to redevelop their base in Devonport and Ngataringa Bay without any consultation with local residents. A huge grassroots protest campaign grew. *I became*



*involved in that campaign and became the spokesperson. Residents whose houses adjoined the Navy's Ngataringa playing fields became anxious about a plan to fence off the whole area. A community network grew, and there were hundreds of members. There were protests in the street that made national television. We set up Ngataringa Bay 2000 Incorporated. A photo of one of the protests took up half the back page of the New Zealand Herald. The Navy's argument was that, under the 1991 Resource Management Act (RMA), they did not need to consult with the local community. Section Two of the RMA says that if what you're doing is necessary for national defence, you are exempt from the Act. The group had to challenge the Navy's actions in the courts. We had three court actions. We had a High Court judicial review, we had two Environment Court hearings, then we ran out of money. We won some, and we lost some, but there were big changes made to the planning environment for the Navy. This was part of what took me into the Green Party, and to stand for the Alliance in 1993.*

Joel ran a vigorous campaign and already had high local visibility because of his Ngataringa activities. He came second for the North Shore seat in the general election. His near election brought him to the attention of the hierarchy within the Green Party and the Alliance; it led to his appointment to the Alliance Council, representing the Greens with Jeanette Fitzsimmons. There were tensions within the Alliance, but Joel believes *what really ruined my reputation in the Alliance was the 1994 water shortage in Auckland, the water crisis.* Lack of rain led to a water shortage and a call to build an emergency pipeline to get water from the Waikato River. *I was really passionate about raw water quality, so I began leading a campaign in Auckland to stop the emergency pipeline being built. I felt strongly that we shouldn't be building infrastructure to suck water out of*

*a polluted river, and mix it with the high-quality waters that we had from the Waitakere and Hunua Ranges.*

It was a huge issue. There was a lot of support for the pipeline, both locally and in Parliament. *I managed to get the Green Party, and then the New Labour Party in Auckland, to support me, so [we] got the Alliance onside to say this emergency pipeline shouldn't go ahead.* Jim Anderton and Sandra Lee, the Alliance leaders, were the only two MPs from the Alliance at the time. They had a difficult time in Parliament when they changed course and began opposing emergency legislation to build the pipeline. *You believe weather forecasts?* Joel suffered as a result of using his initiative to seek cross-party support. *So that was really the end of my national political career.*

Despite that he was still a member of the Green Party. The Green's subsequent decision to leave the Alliance was also a torrid one for Joel, who was then national co-convenor of the Green Party; Joel drew back and had some counselling sessions where he was told that he might be too sensitive for politics. *A few days afterwards I put my name forward to stand for North Shore City Council in 1998.* He ran his campaign under the banner 'Healthy Water, Public Transport' and topped the poll.

Joel was a North Shore City councillor for six years, on a council he believes was very progressive under Mayor George Wood. He became deputy chair of the Works and Environment Committee, dealing with infrastructure—*pipes and roads, basically, and water.* He then became chair of the Committee after the 2001 election. *During my second term planning for the Northern Busway project progressed significantly.* Joel is proud of his involvement with the busway corridor development.

*Probably the most profound thing that Council did from 1998 to 2004 was to clean up the wastewater network.* Often after heavy

rain, human waste from the wastewater network would end up on local beaches. *'Healthy Water' had a double meaning. It was partly about drinking water, but it was also about the beach water. The works committee had to go through this massive programme asking, 'How are we going to clean up the network?'* The Council invested hundreds of millions of dollars in *Project Care.* *We went to Sydney to see what they were doing there. We had to do the work to find out what needed to be done, and then we had to go out to the community with a rate demand which, on average, was a 13% increase.*

Communicating how this increase in rates was going to be used was essential in getting ratepayer support for *Project Care.* Monthly flyers were distributed and reports were made via the *North Shore Times.* Water quality was monitored and the results were made public. *Councillors and the Council had to really bone up*

I was thinking, 'Are you part of the solution here, or are you part of the problem?'

*on the science of all of this and get it right, in order to be certain that the money that it was investing was being spent effectively and was going to make a difference.* Joel says that the problems were complicated and that his understanding of science was useful. *It's all about utilising practical wisdom. Physics, perhaps, puts some beautiful equations around it, but it all comes down to the same thing: conservation of matter, conservation of energy.* Social and cultural behaviour also needed to change. *We must have growth. We must have development. So when you put all of those things into the mix, and you're making decisions, they are difficult decisions.*

After two terms on North Shore City Council, Joel felt his interest in the issues of public transport and waste water were regional issues, and more than simply local ones. He stood for the Auckland Regional Council (ARC) in 2004 and was elected, with Wyn Hoadley, as one of the two North Shore councillors. He was voted chair of the ARC's Transport Committee as well as chair of the Regional Land Transport Committee, which developed

a regional strategy for land transport planning, shifting an emphasis on state highways towards public transport. Joel could again apply his practical mind to this challenge. *I would say it's all physics because if you have a road and you put cars in one end, then it's cars out the other end. It's the same as if you put sewage in and overload a pipe—it's going to overflow at some point.*

He was on the ARC for two terms until the establishment of Auckland Council in 2010. *I opposed amalgamation because you need local government.* He uses the example of housing intensification, where local communities need to be persuaded of its merits. *If you're going to have intensification, you have to have really locally engaged local government. We don't have that. That's why they're running into so many problems with the Proposed Unitary Plan. There's no implementation wing of local government in place. Communities don't trust what's happening.* He is unsurprised by the opposition. *Very predictable. It's how communities behave when their local environment is under threat, and there's no one apparently thinking about road capacity, school capacity, community services, or any of those services.*

Joel returned to study at Auckland University to do a Master of Planning Practice. While finishing his last term at the ARC. Joel returned to lecturing part-time at the University, as well as running his own planning blog. He became interested in waterfront regeneration planning after the ARC took over responsibility for what is now known as Wynyard Quarter in downtown Auckland. In 2013 he began work towards a second PhD, in Waterfront Regeneration Planning, comparing and analysing the history of waterfront regeneration and examining the different outcomes in Wellington and Auckland.

He currently works for the New Zealand Planning Institute as its senior policy analyst. Paid work and research has not stopped Joel from community activism. *My activism, and it's been really intense, is concentrated now on trying to protect from privatisation 2,000 square metres of public space of Queen Elizabeth Square where the*

*Central Rail Link is going to go.* The space at the bottom of Queen Street opposite the historic Britomart railway station building could be subsumed and incorporated into the development of a 40-storey office tower and shopping centre proposed by private developers. *So that's my community action at the moment, and it is very demanding.*

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#### Filmography:

- 1979 *The Umbrella Movie*, Director, Producer and Camera
- 1980 *Lorette*, Director, Producer and Camera
- 1983 *A Slice of the Cake*, Director
- 1985 *Islington against Cuts: Islington Public and Council Reactions against Rate Capping*, Director
- 1990 *Disarming Arguments, Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament*, Director
- 1992 *Mining and the Environment, Coromandel Peninsula Watchdog*, Director, Camera
- 1993 *Sink to Sea, Greenpeace NZ*, Director, Editor, Chief, Cook, and Bottle washer

