

BARRY ALAN ROWLAND



Mr Chancellor

Barry Rowland grew up in Durham, went to school in Durham, got his MBA from Durham University and lives in Rowlands Gill, Durham,but we forgive him. For his entire working life he has been based north of the river, working tirelessly and effectively for Newcastle City Council and more recently for Northumberland County Council. He works for the North East of England and for him the regional subdivisions up here seem irrelevant. He has a track record of aligning different organisations and institutions to work to a shared, ambitious, agenda.

While at Newcastle City Council, Barry played a critical role in turning the prospective but initially abstract three-partner project called 'Newcastle City of Science' into what we have today. He managed both to keep focussed on the high level vision, but also to engineer effective solutions at a level of detail when these were needed. The initial partners were the City Council, Newcastle University and One North East. The demise of One North East left two problems – they were cash contributors, owning a share of the land, so there was a funding hole, but they also represented the enterprise sector, and their absence potentially unbalanced the partnership. Moreover, colleagues here in Newcastle University were understandably cautious about the way forward without One North East– not least because of the financial implications. But here we are, a very few years later, with the aptly named Science Central very pleasingly under construction.

The name itself bears comment. According to spies here, Barry provided robust defence of this name against a team of consultants who suggested we should call it, amongst other things, 'Star Hill'. Well I suppose it is near to things locally termed hill – Arthur's Hill and Summerhill, but it doesn't, to me at least, seem to have the obvious features that go with a hill – such as a clear elevation leading to a summit. Indeed it is famously being built with a bore hole, which would be a very unfortunate nickname, and then there's the coal extraction....Slag Heap?. Star Hill would have been downright dangerous. Science Central is a good name. Everyone knows what we are talking about, it rings true geographically and conceptually, and it cannot possibly be ridiculed. A good example of Barry's sound judgement.

Further examples of vision coupled with pragmatism come from our collective works around sustainability. Newcastle City Council was delighted, but slightly surprised, to come first in the UK 'green city' league table in 2009, but then grasped this opportunity to build this into further projects so that the city is now recognised as a leader in this field. The city came first again the following year, the last time that Forum for the Future created the league, so we can no longer be beat! As Chief Executive at the time, Barry was quoted as saying "Sustainability is right at the top of our agenda, and we intend to keep it there." This aligned perfectly with our own Sustainability agenda, the second of our societal challenge themes, launched at just about the same time.

Our partnerships around Science Central and synergies around sustainability have left enduring legacies. For example, collaboration between the University and the City continues in the area of Offshore and Subsea Engineering, focussing on the industry cluster on the north bank of the Tyne and the new Neptune National Centre Centre for Subsea and Offshore Engineering.

Other legacies of Barry's time as CEO in the city include the regular monthly meetings between our Vice-Chancellor and Newcastle City Council's Chief Executive. These regular meetings help to forge and maintain good communication between our CEO and the City Council's. But the communication may be aided still further by the clever alignment of offices across Barras Bridge, leading to rumours, perhaps too strongly denied by our own VC, of semaphore conversations.

As a resident who pays taxes to Northumberland County Council I must say I am pleased to hear about the exciting work Barry is now doing in improving local services in his new territory, including moves to accelerate important infrastructural and transport projects around Hexham. His portfolio there has also broadened to encompass a range of offshore and other marine activities linking to the Port of Blyth and his work on sustainability will continue in the now wider and more rural communities of Northumberland.

I can't help thinking about all these Durham connections though. As many here will know, including our other Honorary Fellow tonight, the splendid victory of this summer's county cricket championship is built almost entirely, and uniquely in the county cricket scene, on home grown talent. In cricketing terms, Durham is the new Yorkshire. Perhaps this is a county secret that could prove transferable to other sporting areas. There's a lot of talk around the dearth of local talent in premier league football, but what about rugby, Barry's own sport? The Newcastle Falcons League position remains precarious at the moment – I think they need to bring in some local-grown talent. In the recent past, a surprising number of household names who have played for the Falcons were educated locally. Toby Flood grew up in Morpeth. Jamie Noon studied at Northumbria, Lee Dickson and Rob Andrew attended Barnard Castle School in Durham. Gareth Andrew was born in Durham and Jonny Wilkinson attended Durham University. The Durham soil, or air, also created a pretty mean rugby player out of Barry himself. He played serious rugby union for Blaydon until the age of 46 – which makes him either brave or foolhardy, but clearly very fit, and a few years earlier even managed to sneak into a major international competition for Newcastle University's President's team, which got all the way to the final in Paris. Apparently the team photograph from this tournament is still, or was until recently, on display somewhere in the university gym.

Barry and his wife have four children, one of whom is studying Chemistry with us here and also plays rugby for Newcastle University. We're delighted that Tom has accompanied his Dad here tonight.

Effective collaboration between the City Council and this University have helped Newcastle not just to aspire to, but achieve, its standing as a Civic University, and we are grateful for all Barry's personal contributions to this. Mr Chancellor, to honour Barry Rowland's many contributions to this University and to cement the friendships formed here, I ask that you award him an Honorary Fellowship of Newcastle University.

CITATION BY PROFESSOR VICKI BRUCE