

Neil Barker, Partner, MacKellar Schwerdt

Neil Barker works for an architectural firm and was a participant on the first Common Purpose programme in Newcastle in 1989/90. He explains why he joined the programme and what he and his colleagues got out of it

Architecture is ultimately about people. So, understanding them as best you can helps you to get to the bottom of problems and allows you to find ways round what they might perceive as insoluble problems. Common Purpose broadened and deepened my knowledge of people, the organisations they work for and the cities in which they live and work.

"Like most architects, I felt that I already had a very good set of local networks by the nature of my profession and through being an active member of the junior chamber.

To start with I thought that I wasn't going to get as much out of Common Purpose as I might be able to contribute. However, what I found was that whilst I did have an overview that was helpful, I didn't have the depth of knowledge about how the sectors and individuals worked or of the constraints they worked under.

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Immediate access was available to decision-makers at the highest level in organisations across the city, from the police to local government. Often, at an operational level you are dealing with people who aren't aware of the bigger picture or the context in which they are working. Hearing from - and quizzing - people at the top, we got a fuller picture. That is very valuable.

Common Purpose has probably given me a greater tolerance of other people and, other organisations. For example, the City Treasurer's function, which I got to understand very well from a fellow participant, is evidently pivotal to local government whereas I had previously thought it to be benign and not at all proactive.

Of course, the other benefit is the national network. **There is no doubt that if, for instance, we secured a project in another region, I could contact a local Common Purpose graduate in the construction sector who would provide general background information to assist our work.**

Finally, one particular opportunity arose from Common Purpose, to which I think I was able to make a much greater contribution as a result of participating on the programme.

A newly formed local health trust was halfway through the procurement of a £16 million hospital development and needed a non-executive director with construction expertise. I was nominated and appointed to the board. Having experience of the programme where you had so many varying views around the table at the same time helped me to make a positive and constructive contribution to the work of the trust."

ITS NOT WHAT YOU KNOW -
ITS WHO