

Dr Graham Stirling CBE

Graham Stirling has been a Board Member for three years, with his experience in Manufacturing making him a natural choice for Chair of the PCH Manufacturing Board and his business focus is key to helping PCH Manufacturing achieve their aims.

Graham is an experienced businessman who has been involved in the highest echelons of industry throughout his entire life, but meeting him on a one on one basis, you forget any of that as he is friendly, approachable and takes the time to talk to you directly and ignore any outside distractions. For the next hour Graham's focus is purely on telling me about his life, and he regales each memory with a smile, and I get the distinct impression that he genuinely has loved every minute of it.

Born in Manchester and a keen Manchester United fan, Graham went to a technical high school because of his interest in science. Between the ages of 12 to 18 Graham spent most of his time at the gym competing internationally in schoolboy gymnastics competitions. At the age of 18 Graham was set to study sports science at Loughborough but had change of heart when thinking about his long term future and went to study Metallurgy at Manchester University and stayed on to do a PhD in Mechanical Engineering.

Shortly afterwards Graham embarked on his career as an Industrialist and was married to Janet and had the first of his three sons. The family moved around the country with Graham becoming a Development Manager at a company called Lamp Metals in Tyneside before a few years later moving to Bedfordshire and joining a division of USA General Electric. Graham's next move was heading up an aerospace division of BTR Industries in London where he was head hunted by the Barden Corporation.

Graham first moved to Plymouth as Operations Director of the Barden Corporation where the year after he would be made Managing Director and spend the next 28 years. Graham says: "I had a great team around me and we built the business from making a loss to an extremely profitable world leader in the design and manufacture of aerospace and super precision ball bearings." Graham describes working for the Barden Corporation as the best job in the world, having loved every minute of it he also started to put his skills and experience to use in helping a number of local and regional councils and charities.

Graham became Chairman of Devon and Cornwall Training and Enterprise Council which helped start-up companies get off the ground by providing them with help with business plans and preparing designs etc. Two of the Council's most notable achievements you might have heard of – The Eden Project and National Marine Aquarium.

Alongside this work Graham chaired Devon and Cornwall Business Link which covers the advisory side for businesses and was President of Western Engineering Employers Association.

Graham is still a patron of the Shekinah Mission, serves on the Board of the Plymouth Area Business Council and is an external trustee of Plymouth University Student's Union.

One of Graham's most enjoyable and yet most testing roles was as Chair of Plymouth Albion. Graham was on the Board of Albion for 10 years and Chair for eight of those years. Graham says: "It was the most enjoyable role I have been involved with. I went to all the

home games and was extremely proud to represent the club in away games. Some of my proudest moments with the club were representing the club within the Championship at the RFU Twickenham meetings and it was an honour to be Chair of such an amazing club. I ran the Barden Corporation, a multimillion pound company for 28 years and slept like a baby but with Albion I had many a sleepless night about where our funding would be coming from.”

In 2013 Graham joined the PCH Board after meeting the then CEO Clive Turner in his previous roles through the city and through his association with Plymouth Albion. Graham initially met Clive and Elaine for an informal discussion, with Graham admitting it was a sector he had little knowledge of and had little contact with.

“I wasn’t really sure it was for me, but I went along to the meeting out of courtesy. Clive took me around North Prospect on our first meeting. It was absolutely mind blowing. I had read about it in the paper but I had not seen the level of regeneration that was taking place. My decision to join the Board was made that day based on what I had seen and the impact that PCH were having on people’s lives.

“I was so impressed with the improvement of the existing homes through the Decent Homes Programme, but what came across was that it wasn’t just about housing, it was about improving neighbourhoods and people’s lives.”

When asked what he thought he could bring to the Board, Graham tells me: “I have broad business experience working in the private and public sector. One of the areas I thought I could help with and that interested me was the PCH Manufacturing business. I wanted to be involved with the strategic direction of Manufacturing – growing the business but retaining the core values and our sense of social purpose. I could also bring a strong regional and national network of contacts that I could use for the success of the business.”

How about being on a Board of Plymouth’s largest social landlord - surely he had a lot to learn I ask him? “It was definitely a learning curve. I had very little knowledge of the Housing Sector so to join a business with 15,000 homes I was amazed that we weren’t just a landlord and the homes weren’t numbers on a spreadsheet. We were a part of the communities we worked in – we go way beyond a landlord role – I hadn’t appreciated the scope that we go to in the community to help people and that was something that resonated with me and made me proud to be a part of it.

“I also hadn’t quite appreciated the level of regulation that we’re governed by. In one respect its good because it helps us to maintain a strong standard within PCH but on the other hand it can be quite constraining. I have been surprised by the fluctuations in funding streams that are driven by Government policy which means we have to constantly review how we drive the business forward. It has taught me to be more innovate in our dealings and to truly stand on our own two feet and make the best use of the assets we have to help the needs of the people of Plymouth.

“We aim to build 750 homes in the next 5 years and the creativity in the business plan to bring that about is testament to the skills of those on the Board, the management team and every single member of staff within PCH.”

In the future, Graham is very focussed on his role as the Chair of PCH Manufacturing, where any profits made are invested back into the homes and communities we are responsible for.

“The Manufacturing side is not only responsible for meeting PCH’s needs for those products we also have developed and continue to develop sales to the external market. We are supplying the highest quality in terms of workmanship and materials and it is on that basis that we are starting to develop strong sales. I am proud to say that PCH Manufacturing were a key sponsor at the Devon Business Show and Yealmpton Show this year and we will continue to be proud of such a fantastic brand and we are enthusiastic and excited about the future.”