

# Building on IT Savings

Centralising Darlington Building Society's IT resources created cost savings and an agile platform for business growth.



With the financial crisis of 2008 still casting a shadow over the industry, Darlington Building Society knew it needed tight control of its costs. As Darlington's Finance Director, Janice Lincoln, pointed out "We always need to look carefully at our costs. Where possible we need to generate efficiencies and pass these back as savings to our members".

In 2011 Abtec visited the Society in response to an enquiry about call recording equipment. In this meeting Phil Kennerdell, Abtec's Sales Director, questioned the need to provide equipment in each branch. After analysing the Society's infrastructure Kennerdell recommended designing a centralised IT infrastructure, removing duplicate IT and saving costs. This led to the Society inviting tenders to bid for the project to create this homogeneous network. Abtec won this project because of its proven track record of working with building societies and the breadth of its IT expertise.

Abtec completed this project on time and in budget. The project has enabled the Society to create savings and strengthen its business continuity plans. It has created the foundation that will improve the organisation's agility and the platform to deliver new services to its members in the future.

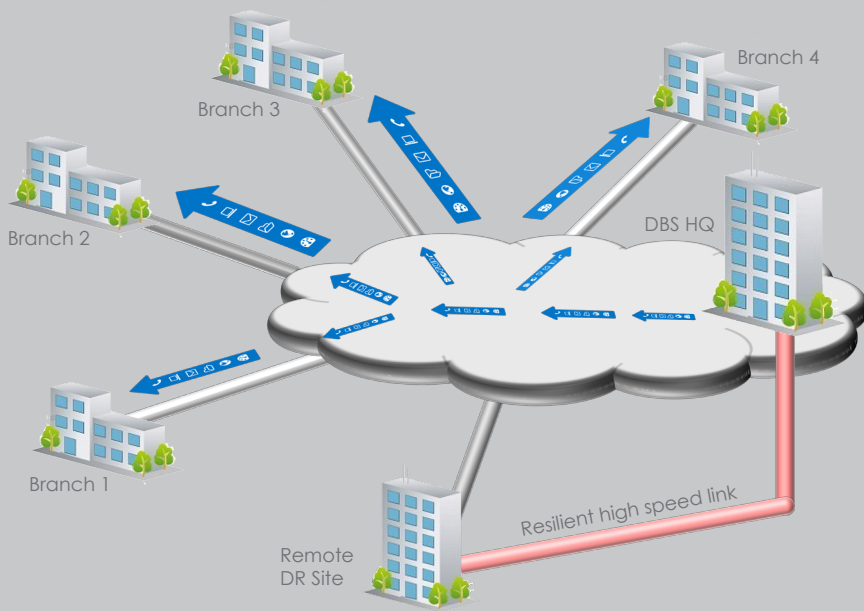
The main thrust of Abtec's proposal involved removing the IT resources from all of the Society's branches, centralising these into the Society's data centre.

**F**ormed in 1856 Darlington Building Society provides financial services through its 10 branch outlets in County Durham, the Tees Valley and North Yorkshire.







It is a mutual building society that is dedicated to looking after local interests. The Society is the 22nd largest building society in the country with assets of over £530M and has a membership of over 80,000. It is renowned for its community support initiatives and in 2013 the Society won the prestigious Mortgage Financial Gazette award for Community Services a record sixth time. It has recently been awarded a "Big Tick" from Business in the Community (BITC) for its innovative affinity mortgage initiative.

*"I willingly recommend Abtec to other building societies because of their dedication and expertise"*

**Paul Gillson**  
Technical Services Manager



Abtec's strategy involved the removal of IT and communications hardware and from each branch, and delivering these as services over its private, secure, managed network.

-  Telephony and call recording
-  Thin client computing
-  email
-  Applications and databases
-  Secure internet
-  Device and network monitoring

Removing duplicate, redundant IT and communications equipment would give Darlington's IT team more time to focus on fulfilling the organisation's IT strategy. Importantly, this proposal would generate cost savings and efficiencies in the organisation; enabling staff to spend more time with members and customers.

The proposal included upgrading the Society's Wide Area Network (WAN) as well as recommending changes to its communications, PC and infrastructure technologies. The new network would improve the availability of IT applications which in turn would help branch staff to dedicate more time to customers.

Abtec installed new, dedicated leased line data connections overlaying them with SIP trunks and secure Internet access. Replacing the Society's ISDN30 connections with SIP trunks generated significant savings. Abtec replaced the organisation's PC estate with thin client PCs and remote desktop services. It also removed telephone systems from each branch, replacing these with two, centralised Mitel communications systems located in the data centres. Finally, Abtec's VMware accredited engineers virtualised the Society's data centre.

"One of the reasons we chose Abtec's proposal was that it used established and trusted technologies. It was also obvious that Abtec's centralised strategy was spot on, it addressed our need to reduce costs." Paul Richardson, Operations Director, Darlington Building Society.

### Applications as a service

Each branch had its own IT and communications hardware. This typically included, desktop PCs, small telephone systems, local file servers and firewalls. Kennerdell, states "Replacing these physical resources with centralised services would reduce management and energy costs".

***"Abtec's centralised strategy was spot on, it addressed our need to reduce costs"***



**Paul Richardson**  
Operations Director

It's a point reiterated by Darlington's Technical Services Manager, Paul Gillson "We often had to travel to branches to perform general maintenance and IT upgrades. Our branches are spread over a wide area, travel and resource costs quickly added up."

Abtec provided a Remote Desktop Services environment running on Cisco servers in the data centres. All PCs at the branches were replaced with WYSE thin clients. "We replaced over 150 PCs and the energy savings will be £34,000 over five years." added Paul Gillson.

Abtec replaced the individual branch telephone systems with two Mitel communications systems, running centrally from each of Darlington's data centres. The Mitel system and Remote Desktop Services operate in virtualised server environments. As one of the UK's leading virtualisation specialists, Abtec knew that this would create efficiencies within the data centre, make it easier to manage the IT estate and reinforce Darlington's business continuity plans. It would also improve the availability of IT resources and applications. Ultimately this should mean that branch staff have to deal with fewer IT issues, helping them spend more time with members and customers.

An example of how the virtualised environment made it easier to add new technologies is described by Paul Gillson. "Our regulatory environment requires us to record internal and external telephone calls. Without Abtec's centralised Mitel solution that would have meant buying and maintaining a recorder for each branch". Instead Abtec installed Oaisys virtualised call recorders, at the data centres, which record inbound and outbound calls from any branch.

Operating in a virtualised environment improves the availability of Darlington's applications, including its telephone calls, as Kennerdell explains. "We provide safeguards for Darlington by running active backup instances of the application servers, including the Mitel system. If anything should happen to the primary server the second instance kicks in straight away."

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**Janice Lincoln**  
Finance Director

## Enhanced communications

The Mitel communications system has enabled the Society to manage its communications strategy better too.

“We’ve been able to improve the experience our members receive when they call us” highlights Paul Gillson. If members call a branch whose telephone extensions are busy the call is automatically rerouted to another branch that can take the call. “We’ve had positive feedback from our members regarding these changes too” he adds.

## Converged network

Improving the availability of applications is all very well, but without the right network branches wouldn’t see any improvement.

Abtec designed a replacement Wide Area Network. This private network connects the branches and head office together. “MPLS technology lets us send voice calls as well as data over the network. This means that calls between sites are now essentially free of charge.” remarks Kennerdell. Time critical network traffic, such as voice calls can be given priority over web browsing and emails. This ensures call clarity between sites. It also means that discrete networks, such as CCTV security, data and voice networks can be converged into a single MPLS network, again reducing costs.

## SIP trunking to save costs

A major cost saving was generated with the replacement of Darlington’s ISDN 30 telephone lines with SIP trunks. Now an established technology, SIP trunks are ‘virtual’ telephone lines, with benefits over traditional telephone lines. Calls made to the Society are delivered through Abtec’s MPLS network to the Mitel communications system. It’s worth noting that these calls remain on Abtec’s private network avoiding the Internet. This is how Abtec can guarantee call quality and reliability. SIP trunks also offer additional flexibility and resilience. Telephone numbers aren’t restricted to geographical areas as they are with traditional services. If the primary leased line connection is severed, the resilient connection takes over the delivery of the calls.

“The removal of most of our ISDN connections has saved us tens of thousands of pounds over the contract”, says Paul Gillson.

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*“I’m reassured to know that if anything does happen Abtec are on the case straight away”*



**Paul Gilson**  
Technical Services Manager



### Keeping in control

As Darlington's reliance on its network increased it took the additional safeguard of subscribing to the Abtec Network Monitor service. This displays the health of the Society's network. Key performance indicators are measured and displayed in an easy to understand graphical interface. If network performance drops below specified levels alerts are sent to Abtec and the Society. "I can see how the network is performing at a glance. I'm reassured to know that if anything does happen Abtec are on the case straight away" adds the lead IT project manager.

### A dual active Disaster Recovery site

Abtec provided further reassurance by building a remote Disaster Recovery (DR) site. Connected by a resilient high speed link, this second data centre is a backup of the primary site. Application servers, including the Mitel communications system, are held here; and in the case of a failure will be active straight away. Providing this DR site in an active/active mode means that the Society makes use of the server resources every day. Server requests are load balanced across both data centres, which means the Society is getting value from its investment even if there isn't a disaster.

Abtec managed the design and installation of the DR site. This included working with Darlington Borough Council's Environmental team managing the planning application on behalf of the Society. The company installed the uninterruptible power supply, power generators and air conditioning for the project. A truly end to end service



*Abtec provided backup generators and data centre air conditioning*

## Abtec provided:

- Managed, resilient WAN
- WYSE thin clients
- Virtualised Mitel communication system
- Virtualised Call Recorder
- SIP trunks over MPLS
- Cisco servers
- Internet access over MPLS
- Microsoft Office and Microsoft Data Centre Licences
- Microsoft Remote Desktop Services
- Microsoft Exchange Upgrade
- Cisco IronPort
- Cisco ASA Firewalls
- VMware
- Veeam
- Cabling – Cat5e and power
- Billing Platform
- Abtec Network Monitor
- Project management
- Engineering work
- Air conditioning
- UPS
- Generator
- Refuelling contract
- Training
- Disaster recovery site
- End to end consultation

## The Results

Abtec was selected for this project because its proposal matched the Society's overall business strategy; its proven track record of working with building societies and its ability to support the variety of services in the project. The project has saved the Society substantial costs, which have been reinvested in creating a more efficient and effective IT and communications infrastructure. This in turn is generating further savings throughout the organisation. This is demonstrated by Darlington's IT team's response to branch IT issues; "We used to travel to branches to sort out problems. This took time, cost and meant that the branch staff member may be out of action for a while. Now we simply log into our central server and resolve the issue. It's much faster and frees up the staff member to continue helping customers." says Paul Gillson. The Society has measured the impact of the project, financially and from its users' experiences; "We've had a significant drop in application and network problems since the infrastructure upgrade" states Paul Gillson.

Another reassurance for the Society was Abtec's professional approach. Technologies were rigorously tested in the company's Leicestershire labs, before deployment. Its project management team co-ordinated the variety of vendor suppliers to make sure the project was delivered on time. Its engineering work, from cabling to power supply, was finished to an incredibly high standard.

The Society has a more effective and efficient infrastructure. It has a platform that is flexible to respond quickly to the organisation's demand, and a platform for future services. "We've recently moved our head office and data centre. Abtec's strategy and work made this a simple process, like moving Lego bricks from one building to another. I willingly recommend Abtec to other building societies because of their dedication and expertise." states Paul Gillson.

These benefits will help Darlington Building Society focus more resource on serving its membership now and into the future.

## Our partners for this project:

