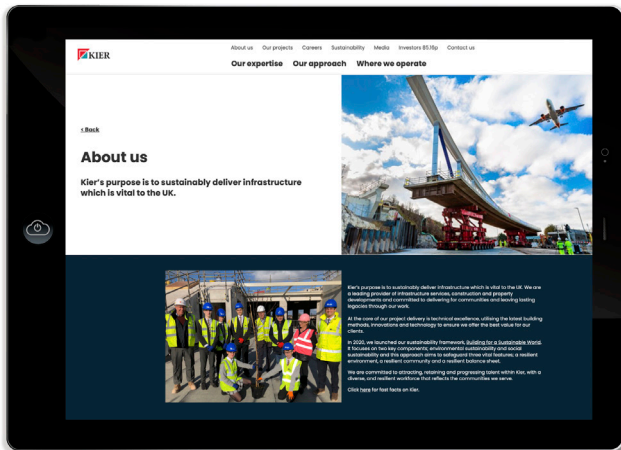# Claranet builds a fast and secure new future for Kier with Azure VMware Solution

Kier Group's purpose is to sustainably deliver infrastructure which is vital to the UK.

As a tier one contractor, the company is responsible for delivering next generation infrastructure, including HS2, Hinkley Point C, and the new Sofia off-shore wind farm, as well as schools and hospitals which critically support communities.

www.kier.co.uk

Mark Wiltshire, Head of Architecture at Kier explains the situation: "It was clear we needed a more controllable and manageable estate from a governance, performance, and cost perspective. Moving to a private cloud platform gave us this to a certain extent, but we knew the ultimate end destination would be one of the public clouds operated by the big three hyperscalers."

As Samantha Coughlan, Business Delivery Director at Kier explains: "The Group IT team at Kier started to explore more strategic long-term options in 2021 to modernise the organisation. The shift out of ten data centres in 2018 was a big project. But the scale of a move to public cloud was on an entirely different level: a potential 1400 virtual machines, 262 applications, and 420 terrabytes of data… all to be migrated with minimal downtime and zero business disruption."

> ❝ **It's useful to think of AVS as a stepping stone for businesses to move fast into the outskirts of Azure, and to then become Azure native at a pace that suits the organisation."**

The challenge

For many businesses in the construction industry, legacy IT and infrastructure has become a real focus of attention, and the situation for Kier was no different.

Back in 2018 the company's IT estate was spread across ten data centres following a number of business acquisitions, making it difficult to manage, expensive to run, and resulting in a large carbon footprint. Kier's first response was to consolidate everything down to two colocation data centres and a private cloud environment. But this was just the first step on their journey to becoming a cloud-first enterprise.

The solution

Early discussions with Microsoft showed that Azure would be the best fit for Kier's long-term vision in the public cloud. For construction firms like Kier, a public cloud platform can be the key to a strong competitive edge in their industry with tools in Azure such as data analytics, IoT, and AI making the difference.

Microsoft introduced Kier to Claranet, and initial scoping made it clear that the three teams working together could achieve a brand new, rapid and collaborative migration path to public cloud: the Azure VMware Solution (AVS).

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AVS is designed to accelerate migrations to Microsoft's public cloud so that businesses can reduce risk and cost, and set up their new environment - no matter how large - at the flick of a switch.

James Hollins, Principal Solution Architect at Claranet explains: "It's useful to think of AVS as a stepping stone for businesses to move fast into the outskirts of Azure, and to then become Azure native at a pace that suits the organisation."

"What we were able to do was to create a well designed landing zone integrating AVS and a migration path that enabled Kier to migrate in three months. A conventional migration for the size of their IT estate could have taken a year or more."

The Claranet and Kier partnership did have some obstacles to overcome. For example, Microsoft's designed approach is to initiate the migrations from the source data centre and push VMs out of an existing data centre and into the AVS platform. This can be achieved using VMware's HCX application mobility platform, creating a copy - a replica - that can be switched on when the migration is ready to go live.

But for Kier, permissions and controls with their existing private cloud provider prevented this. What this meant was that the teams at Kier and Claranet had to get creative and reverse engineer the migration, *pulling* assets out of the private cloud into AVS.

Simon Sumners, Claranet Senior Infrastructure Engineer and AVS technical lead noted: "We all had a few late nights, but working together we got there in the end. It was a first for Claranet, Microsoft, and VMware."

> " This is a huge step forward for us. We can now map out our future as a cloud-native, scalable, resilient, and sustainable business."
>
> **Mark Wiltshire**
> **Head of Architecture at Kier Group**

The results

The immediate result is that Kier's move to public cloud has been a full scale lift and shift. 1400 virtual servers were assessed for migration, with 600 decommissioned before the move.

The result is that 640 servers and 135 applications now run on the AVS platform, and the team at Kier are working with Claranet to create a roadmap to further modernise at speed and become an Azure native organisation.

Immediate future work with Claranet includes embedding FinOps to manage costs for existing Azure estate and new landing zone subscriptions. Leveraging the Microsoft security model which can enable the data to be used in capabilities such as Sentinel is another area that the team at Kier are focusing on.

Taking advantage of the more transformational opportunities in Azure is the next step, including native Azure Services like Secure FTP, serverless compute, and Azure Virtual Desktop.

Ultimately, all eyes are on leveraging data to allow the business to make better, quicker, and more informed decisions. In such a data rich and data intense organisation such as Kier, this is the cornerstone of their digital future and will drive true business value through better team collaboration and more effective decision making.

"This is a huge step forward for us," says Mark Wiltshire at Kier. "Until now we had been playing around at the edges. But with the immediate move to Azure through AVS and Claranet, we can now really map out our future as a cloud-native, scalable, resilient, and sustainable business."

Samantha Coughlan, Solutions Delivery Director at Kier adds: "There's the old saying that if you've done something well, people don't know you have done it and this has been the hallmark of our move to AVS and ultimately to Azure.

"Despite the scale of this migration, there has been minimal business impact. It has just happened in the background, our colleagues none the wiser but our IT future more secure, safer, and more sustainable than ever before."

As Tony Graveney, CIO at Kier concludes: "I joined Kier halfway through the migration to AVS, and have been impressed with the collaboration between Claranet and the Kier teams to ensure the AVS migrations have been a success."

"We now consider Claranet to be part of our trusted partner network which gives our internal IT teams the ability to access a pool of skilled resources ranging from architecture, operational, or a development service, to help accelerate new technology."

For more information about Claranet's services, and the benefits these deliver, go to: www.claranet.co.uk

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