

CASE STUDY

Barratt Developments

Barratt modernises site & sales
office IT process with an outsourced
solution from FluidOne

FluidOne



BARRATT
DEVELOPMENTS PLC

Managed SD WAN Service comprising Cisco Meraki, 4G, laptops, printers and ordering portal provide a resilient framework for rapid deployment and collaboration.

Barratt Developments planned to implement a Microsoft 365 cloud strategy but needed to improve the communications infrastructure at its construction and sales offices to make the initiative viable. The company was also keen to adopt an Opex model for IT services and equipment.

An outsourced procurement and network management service from FluidOne, based on Cisco Meraki SD-WAN and 4G, gives Barratt the agility to swiftly support site openings, the financial flexibility to deploy IT services on-demand, and a standardised infrastructure at every site.

Barratt Developments is the nation's largest housebuilder, building around 15,000 homes this year, including both private and affordable housing. Barratt's business is acquiring land, obtaining planning consents and building the highest quality homes in places people aspire to live. In 2019, the industry's prestigious 'What House?' event awarded the company 'Best Large Housebuilder' and 'Housebuilder of the Year'. It has also been named as the 'Best Large Housebuilder' for the past two years by Housebuilder magazine.

Key Points

FluidOne Managed SD WAN enables Cloud transformation; providing flexible, reliable performance for Microsoft 365 and Teams

4G infrastructure enables 5-day SLA for circuit delivery

New site deployment time reduced by at least 50%

A stable and performance network is required for site and sales office operations.

Over the last seven years, Barratt Developments has increased its housing output by 40%, and in 2019 was the UK's biggest housebuilder by volume. A significant factor in maintaining this performance level has been the group's focus on improving operational efficiency and controlling costs.

Barratt has also successfully established efficiencies in design innovation and sustainable building practices and recently committed to delivering net-zero carbon homes by 2030.

One area where there was still scope for improvement was the comms infrastructure on construction sites.

Barratt believes a 4G infrastructure could boost productivity and enable collaboration

Since the early noughties, companies have adopted Cloud technologies widely. More recent technologies like Microsoft 365 and Teams enable companies and suppliers to collaborate remotely on projects, making it even more compelling.

Barratt recognised the benefits of Cloud and was keen to adopt the technology within its construction business. Before this could happen, the company needed to upgrade its IT infrastructure.

“We were due an equipment refresh, but we also needed a new connectivity solution to ensure that users had a stable and performant connection,” said Ade Brant, Group IT Director at Barratt Developments. **“Historically, we had been reliant on 3G and fixed-line broadband, but the performance isn’t there for apps like Microsoft 365. With 4G available and more resilient, it made sense to go down this route.”**

Centralised procurement appeals as a strategy for IT cost control

In addition to adopting a cloud model, the company wanted to outsource the procurement and management of its infrastructure. This approach would allow Barratt to move IT from a capital expense to an operating cost, increasing its agility as a business and allowing it to scale as needed rather than trying to future proof technology by overbuying at the start of the project.

“Given we have thousands of computers and devices spread across 700 offices, it was an attractive option to have this managed for us to allow us to focus on other areas of IT delivery.”

An important aspect of outsourcing procurement was to centralise the process for all of Barratt's 27 operating divisions.

Challenges

“Each division has its own territory with 20-30 sales offices and construction sites,” said Ade. “It’s difficult to account for what money they’re spending on setting up each site.”

Centralising procurement to provide a one-stop-shop would make it easy for each building owner to self-serve. It would also make it easy to track IT spending across the organisation.

Barratt awards tech refresh to managed services provider FluidOne

The initial project requirement was to complete a technology refresh at 700 existing offices while concurrently installing the same infrastructure at a further 200 new sites.

Barratt were keen to understand the market and the options outside of their incumbent supplier, therefore opened up the tender to other potential providers.

“We wanted a partner we could charge with the overall management of the network – from procurement, setup and installation to monitoring and support - making sure everything is fully tested and signed off on-site. The ultimate aim is that our sites and sales teams can carry out their work and people remain connected,” said Ade.

FluidOne was already known to Barratt, having run a successful 4G trial for the company, making it an ideal candidate for the project.

“We were impressed with FluidOne’ flexibility, in particular the fact that they’re equipment neutral,” said Ade.

The Barratt team also found it refreshing that they didn’t have to define the technical specifications of the project for FluidOne.

“The problem we have with some suppliers is we’re used to feeding them with exactly what we’d like – products and Connectivity. FluidOne, present solution options based on their knowledge and expertise” said Ade.

“FluidOne was also flexible enough to make changes to the bid and willing to look at other equipment. We got the sense that nothing was too much trouble. Some suppliers try to influence based on what they want to sell. FluidOne didn’t do that.” he continued.

Solution

FluidOne Managed SD WAN with Cisco Meraki offers the best support for Barratt's agile business strategy

FluidOne designed a managed SD WAN solution that offers Barratt simple, dependable performance for applications in the Cloud and the flexibility to deploy quickly and change frequently.

The FluidOne solution uses SD WAN coupled with 4G mobile technology. This solution will allow Barratt to move the Connectivity around the site as it goes through different development stages in construction.

With applications being predominantly Cloud-based, SD WAN offered the most flexibility. Cisco Meraki has become a popular choice for FluidOne and Barratt, who together chose the MX68 Cloud Managed Security and SD-WAN Appliance for the programme.

“We like the power and agile approach of the technology,” said Ade. **“Features like zero-touch provisioning mean that new devices are configured automatically and to a defined standard. We also like the fact that Meraki is updated in real-time because it means the edge of the WAN is always secure.”**

An essential feature of the managed service is the online ordering portal that makes ordering simple, fast and auditable for Barratt.

The service also includes the award-winning FluidOne monitoring service.



Global pandemic fails to derail FluidOne project delivery

The project started in December 2019 but came to an abrupt stop in March 2020 as the Covid-19 pandemic hit the UK.

“Covid-19 shut down all of our sales and site offices,” said Ade. “We commenced the implementation ahead of Covid, the plan being to convert each of the 27 divisions completely before going onto the next. We’d completed one when the crisis hit, and we couldn’t continue due to our site close-down process.”

Despite the constraints, the FluidOne team continued working on the project remotely and configuring the kit, so it was ready to go, ahead of Barratt’s revised deployment plan.

“As soon as government regulations allowed, we started to open sites in a phased approach opening in waves, based on business criteria such as build stage and number of completed units,” said Ade. For FluidOne this meant that instead of systematically working through each division, it now needed to implement across the UK based on the reopening.”

“The project manager we have at FluidOne has been amazing with every single change. The top word that comes to mind is flexibility,” he continued.

In the early stages of the pandemic there were no hotels open, so FluidOne engineers could only visit sites within reach of their bases.

“One of the issues was getting equipment to the region given the restrictions, meaning some divisions with the old equipment were at a disadvantage.

Despite all the changes and limitations, Ade and the wider Barratt leadership team were very impressed with the speed and quality of the rollout.

“We were able to restart the project in May and completed the project in early September – only a few weeks off the original target that was set ahead of Covid,” said Ade.

“It’s been very smooth, given FluidOne deployed so many installations in such a short time.”

New SLAs kick competition into touch and offer renewed confidence for local staff

It's still early days in the Barratt-FluidOne relationship, but the company is already seeing benefits.

"We have seen an impressive improvement in terms of service versus our previous solution," said Ade. **"With FluidOne, we can submit an order on Monday and have it delivered and installed later that week."**

"Connectivity with the FluidOne 4G solution is immediate; there's no waiting around for months for a fixed-line. FluidOne has better than halved the deployment time of our previous solution," he continued.

Ade is also expecting that FluidOne will improve Barratt's regional, divisional teams' perception about how IT is delivered.

"Ultimately, when a sales office launches, it'll be a marketing event – a fixed point in time," said Ade. **"With FluidOne, our divisions will have more confidence that if they organise a launch date, they'll get the equipment in time. That wasn't the case previously; they've had to launch with pens and paper on more than one occasion in the past."**

Now that procurement, delivery and management of the network are outsourced, Ade believes that FluidOne's award-winning monitoring and reporting system will be crucial.

"Trying to keep on top of 700 sites – knowing what kit is installed and if it went in as planned – would not be possible without the service wrap around from FluidOne," said Ade. **"They take away a considerable number of problems in terms of asset management. Of course, with the equipment owned by FluidOne, it's in their best interest to know where it is and how it's connected, but it's also vital to us. The FluidOne monitoring portal provides amazing clarity about the network, and it's totally transparent: we can see what FluidOne can see if we want to."**

Results

Flexible working becomes a reality for construction teams at Barratt

The new equipment and connectivity from FluidOne facilitates collaborative working and the use of Office 365 apps like Microsoft Teams. The old setup would be too much of a challenge and provide a poor user experience.” said Ade.

With the FluidOne solution, the company is now just consuming networking equipment, WiFi, PCs, laptops and printers through the managed service.

“When owning the site-based equipment, asset management is a challenge as you need to keep track of where it all is,” said Ade. **“In the model that we have now, FluidOne has taken the management responsibility away from us; it’s now their responsibility to know where stuff is and highlight back to us if anything is unaccounted for.”**

The new model also gives Barratt flexibility when it comes to upgrading tech in the future

“We now consume equipment through the managed service, and after three years, it’s up to us if we want to sweat those assets longer or update,” said Ade.

In the past, keeping track of regional expenditure was a challenge. With all procurement going through FluidOne, they bill each of the 27 regions directly, so there’s now a clear audit trail for regional resources and expenditure.



Barratt's network is finally in a safe pair of hands with FluidOne

In the relationship it's established with FluidOne, Barratt effectively hands over the keys to each site and leaves FluidOne to manage and co-ordinate the logistics of deploying IT equipment with local staff.

“One of the greatest benefits we’ve seen from our relationship so far is having a partner we’ve got faith in. We have confidence that they’ll get it right and get it done right-first-time round,” said Ade. **“I do feel that we’re in a safe pair of hands.”**

Ade shared his final thoughts on the partnership. **“We were so impressed and grateful for how you managed the rollout back in the summer. You’re a very trusted partner.”** He went on to add, **“I look forward to working with you and to continually improving the great service we provide to our site and sales teams.”**

FluidOne

We design, deploy and manage the networks on which our customers run their businesses in an increasingly digital world. Our hybrid networks will help customers digitalise their businesses

The best price possible

Our hybrid networks, enhanced by SD-WAN, blend carriers and technologies to optimise the price of every site, and minimise installation cost with zero touch deployment. We offer transparent pricing for peace of mind.

The fastest deployment

Our hybrid networks let you choose circuits that deliver fastest for each site, and our 4G WAN circuits offer 2 day delivery with seamless transition to permanent circuits.

The easiest migration

We can phase your migrations to suit you, minimising cost and hassle.

The best performance and uptime

Our advanced monitoring shows the whole application path, raise 95% of key issues proactively and allows detailed reporting and drill-down to show issues and long-term trends.

The most enjoyable and pain free experience

Our end to end digital systems and processes deliver Right first time with clear, accurate bills.