

A Rural Recovery

The team at Lancashire-based Rural Futures are used to breathing life back into countryside developments – but when its remote office was hit by an unexpected natural disaster, it was Cosurica that came to the rescue.

Formed as a public-private sector partnership in the 1990s, Rural Futures became a private specialist consultancy in 2008. In its original incarnation as Lancashire Rural Futures, it received funding from European, national and local programmes and was the UK's

largest service delivering business and environmental support to all rural business sectors. Between 2004 and 2008 it facilitated over £26million of public and private investment, created over 1200 new jobs and placed 12,000 hectares of land under positive environmental management.

With the closure of its public sector office base, the company needed to find a new location for its business operations. After initially transferring to an industrial estate in Preston, in 2012 they moved to an old school in the village of Warton, Carnforth. The company knew that they'd need specialist assistance with their IT to allow the residential building to be utilised for business.

John Welbank, the company's director chose Cosurica to set up the new office IT infrastructure after meeting them through Business Link, a then government-funded business advice and guidance service.

"In many ways, becoming an independent company meant we were pretty much starting from scratch when it came to building our infrastructure," says John. "We'd inherited some equipment from the old organisation but knew we'd have to invest in a server and a network to make the business work once we were based in Carnforth. Cosurica had already been involved in some IT projects with Business Link so we knew we could trust them. They came over to Warton and performed an on-site assessment, providing a detailed proposal for what would be required. They then installed all the cabling work and hardware required to get the business up and running. The whole process was relatively quick and more importantly for us, stress free. We obviously had a lot of other things to think about during the transition period, so being able to hand the IT over to somebody we could trust really took the pressure off."

Rural Futures sources all hardware, including laptops from Cosurica. "We often use quite data-intensive software such as GIS Mapping systems and CAD software which place a high demand on our processors," explains John. "Cosurica know the hardware market well, and always give us well-considered advice when it comes to investing in new technology and upgrading our devices. Their IT support service has proved invaluable when it comes to resolving any issues we've had as they're always available straight away. We don't have to put things on hold whilst we wait for an answer."



Challenging times call for more innovative solutions

Whilst it was with Cosurica's support that Rural Futures was able to set up their business, it was at the end of 2015 that the company really proved its worth as an IT support provider.

In December of that year, Storm Desmond caused record amounts of rainfall, breaking the United Kingdom's 24 hour record of 341.4 mm of rain on December 5th. The resulting flooding caused severe disruption, seeing 5,200 homes flooded across Lancashire and Yorkshire, roads blocked and a number of bridges suffering collapse.

"Storm Desmond came out of the blue and really impacted our business," says John. "We'd never really planned what we'd do in the case of an environmental disaster or put a business continuity plan together. It just wasn't something we'd ever have expected we'd have to deal with."

When it struck, the storm left Rural Futures office in Warton and its employees' homes without power for 24 hours. "This put us out of action for at least a couple of days," explains John. "When we regained power, our nearby homes recovered broadband connectivity, but our office didn't. Our office had been flooded and whilst our on-site Microsoft Small Business Server had been kept out of harm's way, we couldn't access our emails without an internet connection into the premises. This was a real issue."

Cosurica were able to help. Migrating the company to Office 365 meant that emails could be stored in the cloud and accessed remotely. The migration was undertaken within a matter of hours bringing Rural Futures back to up to full speed.

"The broadband to our office actually ended up being down for a number of weeks because the flood damage had been that bad," says John. "Moving to Office 365 was a wise decision and it's benefitted us in other ways too. Not only do we have increased resilience should an environmental incident hit us again, but it's given us greater flexibility in where we can work. We often find ourselves on farms and remote building projects, so Office 365 gives us access to important documents and communications from wherever we're working on a particular day."

When it comes to continuing with their rural development work, the future looks promising. With a contract from The Princes Trust, the company is now working on newly-created Prince's Farm Resilience Program which brings together farm enterprises and local networks to help sustain a diverse farming sector in the UK.

"Whilst being based in out in the sticks used to come with its challenges, advancing technology means there are now far fewer barriers to operating a successful rural business. Having the right the IT Support partner has been critical to our business and I hope Cosurica will continue to support us as we build our own 'rural future'."



To find out how we can help your organisation call us now on 01535 358161
email us at info@cosurica.com visit www.cosurica.com