

# Building an agile finance function for the future

## The challenge

Since opening its first park in Norfolk in 1998, the award-winning GreenAcres Group has helped many families say goodbye to their loved ones in a caring, tranquil and beautiful environment. Serving the members of all faiths and communities, the range of life events held at GreenAcres include funerals, weddings and baby naming ceremonies.

When the group, the largest of its kind in the UK, was bought in 2018 it was using two separate finance systems as a result of acquisition. With a new CFO and Group Accountant in place, the finance team could begin a transformation that would not only create a single, centralised finance platform but also engineer the agility and scalability necessary for future growth.

## The requirement

During their careers, both Cate Gray, GreenAcres' new CFO and Lianne Cassidy, Group Accountant, had successfully deployed Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) systems. Building on this positive experience, they met with Clarivos consultants in August 2019 to understand the specific tactical and strategic benefits of SAP Business by Design (ByD) for GreenAcres.

The finance team's short-term objective was to streamline finance processes, reduce the high-levels of manual data entry and time-consuming data manipulation, yet retain Excel as the interface for employees from across the network of seven parks located in the UK.

Cate Gray said: "Our focus for the initial phase of our finance transformation was implementing ByD to enhance our reporting and analysis capability as well as driving efficiency and accuracy. Our strategic vision was to create a flexible finance solution that could accommodate business growth and easily adapt to the specific reporting, capital investment and cross charging requirements demanded by future acquisitions. It was clear from the outset that Clarivos could help us achieve both our short- and long-term business objectives."

### ABOUT THE CLIENT

GreenAcres Group is the largest private cemetery and ceremonial company in the UK. With seven parks and over 270 acres of stunning woodland and manicured parkland across the country, the group is particularly known for its award-winning woodland burials as well as offering other community services that welcome people of all beliefs and denominations for celebrations such as weddings and baby naming ceremonies – all hosted within the park's tranquil surroundings.

Every GreenAcres park is a unique and stunningly beautiful place where burials and interment of cremated remains take place within a mature woodland landscape – offering a sustainable and environmentally sensitive alternative to traditional cemeteries and crematoriums as well as an inspirational location for loved ones to be remembered.

### INDUSTRY

Burials, Weddings, Community Services

### BUSINESS CHALLENGE

- Multiple finance systems within the group
- Over-reliance on manual data entry
- New owners required different views of business data

### GREENACRES GROUP REQUIREMENTS

- Create a scalable finance platform to support future growth
- Streamline processes with increased automation
- Retain familiar data entry interface for employees across the UK
- Increase reporting and analysis speed and capability for decision making

### CLARIVOS SOLUTION

- Financial and management reporting
- Custom solution for sales invoice processing
- Intercompany and fixed asset modules
- Self-service expense management

### BUSINESS IMPACT

- ByD implementation delivered on time and on budget
- Automating processes saved 50% FTE per month
- Stable application using familiar and trusted technology
- Faster more powerful analytical capability to support group decision making

**“Our strategic vision was to create a flexible finance solution that could accommodate business growth.”**

## The solution

The finance team worked with Clarivos to review their chart of accounts and engage in a series of practical workshops to precisely define and prioritise requirements.

“We essentially walked through our whole business with Clarivos to establish what we needed from our new financial system and the roles and responsibilities for the programme. The entire finance team were involved with individuals championing delivery in specific areas. This was a highly collaborative and productive process focusing on greater efficiency and accuracy”, said Lianne Cassidy.

One example of process improvement was finding a more efficient way to input the high volume of sales invoices, many of which were for small amounts. Clarivos worked with the finance team to develop a custom solution to make this process faster and less labour intensive...

The GreenAcres finance team had other efficiency goals in its sights:

“Due to the nature of our business, the finance team is required to process large amounts of pre-payments and revenue deferrals. We wanted to automate reversing recurring journals to ensure that revenue is recognised in the right period. We have also chosen to implement the ByD fixed asset module to automate our depreciation calculations, as we were concerned about the resilience of our previous Excel formulae,” said Lianne Cassidy.

As specialist skills and facilities are cross charged between each site, another significant process enhancement is the use of ByD's intercompany module which, by automating inter-company charges, has halved the number of journal entries for the finance team.

## The future

“We are very pleased with what we have achieved in such a short time frame. Our financial information is more relevant and we can respond to queries faster. Working with Clarivos, we have delivered this transformation on time and on budget, and saved 50% of an FTE's valuable time previously spent on report running, entering trial balances and manipulating data,” remarked Cate Gray.

Before going fully live, the finance team planned a period of

intense key-user training and testing.

All of the key-user training was conducted at Clarivos's Paddington Office. Although this could have been conducted at a GreenAcres park, bringing the team together offsite provided an opportunity to completely focus on learning without day to day distractions. Training offsite also fostered a great sense of team bonding and common purpose – with specially designed interactive sessions that were both practical and fun.

The finance team were committed to rigorously testing the solution.

“We formulated testing scripts to see what worked well and if anything failed. This was an invaluable element of our success – identifying issues and drawing up a remediation plan. A Clarivos consultant supported us throughout the entire testing phase – working alongside us as we executed test processes such as executing payment runs and our month end. Testing is often perceived to be a tedious process but the energy and direction of the Clarivos consultant ensured that it was highly productive,” explained Lianne Cassidy.

The team has also driven greater efficiency with ByD by enabling self-service features such as allowing employees to input approved expenses directly into the finance system, which automatically feeds into payroll.

As with many businesses, GreenAcres Group outsources its IT. Throughout the implementation the team did not require any support from their IT partner beyond checking connectivity to the ByD application.

**“The Clarivos team was somewhat unique as it included senior people with backgrounds in both accounting and IT. They spoke our language and understood our needs both practically and technically.”**

## The future

Now that ByD is live, the finance team is undertaking a period of review to identify any further process optimisation. They also plan to roll-out access to more users across the park network. In addition to this, Clarivos is currently supporting GreenAcres as it integrates sales transactions directly to and from its operating system.

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## About Clarivos

Founded in 1996, Clarivos is a specialist technology consultancy that partners specifically with CFOs and the office of finance. We build trusted relationships by bolting deep business know-how and proven technology capabilities to our collaborative leadership values.

At the heart of our success is the recognition that building trust with clients is critical. We go to extraordinary lengths to understand the full picture, from the current challenges to future goals, while inspiring clients to become more visionary across the system landscape.

Breaking away from legacy systems and streamlining processes is a bold and increasingly necessary step. Choosing Clarivos ensures you have a partner with you at every step of that journey.

Together we deliver the optimum technology solution - grounded in pragmatism but always with an eye on innovation - the result? Innovative, Transformative Processes, and Technology - first time, every time.

We make complex stuff simple, reliable and **transformational**.



### 20+ years of Financial Transformation

Regulatory Compliance, Consolidation, Planning, Budgeting, Forecasting and Analytics is in our DNA

### Innovation that makes a difference



Two decades of experience underpins Clarivos INSIGHT solutions with tailored, out-of-the-box functionality, designed to solve specific business challenge



### 300+ successful projects delivered

Empowering the office of finance to gain insight, create value and drive decision making

### Strategic software partnerships



Deep knowledge of leading ERP, EPM and Analytics solutions helps maximise the value of new and existing business applications