

## Dyer & Butler: Essential infrastructure specialists accelerating in the rail sector

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It was on Christmas Eve when Dyer & Butler's Rail Director Chris Darlow received a call from Network Rail. A landslide, triggered by extended periods of torrential rain, had occurred at Wivelsfield on the Brighton mainline and a major emergency embankment stabilisation intervention was required to minimise service disruption over the important Christmas and New Year period.

The equivalent of seven months of rain had fallen at the site between October and December, making it the fifth wettest autumn on record. Conscious that this stretch of railway was vulnerable to a slip, Network Rail had implemented an inspection regime and a standby emergency response team to monitor the slope and raise the alarm, should it show signs of movement and potentially failing.

Over the course of Christmas Day, a Dyer & Butler project team was mobilised along with the support of supply chain partners. Major engineering materials were sourced through discussions across the supply chain, safety documentation was produced and designers assembled and despatched to site.

By Boxing Day, work was well underway, with the formation of access roads and construction of a piling mat in preparation for the installation of a sheet pile retaining wall intervention solution. By January 6th,

when the majority of the traveling public were returning to work following the festive period, the work had progressed well, ensuring a train service from London to Brighton was maintained.

Wivelsfield was to be the first of several emergency response schemes successfully completed by Dyer & Butler on behalf of Network Rail over the winter period. From embankment strengthening through to flooding protection and drainage repairs, a number of emergency repair works were delivered including further landslips on the Wessex route.

It was a busy end to a landmark calendar year for Dyer & Butler during which it also delivered one of its biggest rail programmes to date – the Cotswolds Platform Extension Programme.

The programme, delivered for and on behalf of Network Rail infrastructure projects Wales & Western, was to facilitate the introduction of new Hitachi train rolling stock, providing increased capacity to accommodate additional train cars across seven stations. The programme of works included additional upgrade and refurbishment activity including 11 platform extensions, resurfacing, drainage renewals, realignment of copers, platform lighting, platform gauging, stop boards, shelters and SISS equipment upgrades.

These two very different programmes of work both served to highlight the continued evolution of Dyer & Butler's service portfolio and geographical coverage over the last two years.

It was back in December 2016 when the business was acquired by M Group Services, a leading service provider to essential infrastructure markets in the UK and Ireland. For M Group Services, the acquisition of Dyer & Butler was key to broadening its scope of expertise and providing momentum to its growth plans for the rail and wider transport sector.

With over 35 years of rail sector experience, Dyer & Butler offered a strong track record of sustained organic growth built on the back of longstanding client relationships with Network Rail and TOCs.

Dyer & Butler is one of three businesses that make up the Group's transport division, sitting alongside railway electrification infrastructure specialist, Antagrade Electrical, and KH Engineering Services, a specialist in electrical and mechanical engineering services for the rail and wider transport sectors.

Rail Director, Chris Darlow, joined the organisation in November 2017 and was tasked with the responsibility of growing its portfolio of rail activity. Under his leadership, the rail division has continued to evolve, broadening its geographical coverage and delivering a diverse portfolio of asset management, renewals and enhancements works for key clients across the sector.

Here Chris speaks to [railbusinessdaily.com](http://railbusinessdaily.com) about Dyer & Butler and its strategic growth plan for the future.

"I think M Group Services recognised that Dyer & Butler had established itself as a really trusted brand in the rail sector, with a strong track record in delivering works from maintenance through to major projects for numerous rail clients under both framework and stand-alone contracts," he said.

"As a result of our track record for programme delivery and an extensive understanding of the rail

industry's infrastructure, we have forged relationships with Network Rail, Transport for London and a number of TOCs.

"Being part of a wider Group means we are well positioned to utilise the financial scale, broader scope of capability and wider resources to fuel our growth and continued expansion. In return, our presence provides the Group's other divisions, such as utilities and telecom, with access to our rail credentials and expertise when they are undertaking works in the proximity of the railway network.

"Supporting our existing resources with additional capability and capacity from our parent Group has elevated Dyer & Butler in the rail sector. We can now offer clients the multi-disciplinary one stop shop Principal Contractor approach they are looking for.

"What has emerged from our client conversations is that there is clearly an appetite and demand for the business to take on more long-term and major projects.

"We believe that we are in a unique position to offer something different in the market place – a service that combines the strength and resources of our parent Group, coupled with the self-delivery, customer focused, 'user-friendly' service ethos of a medium sized organisation."

The Cotswolds Platform Extension Programme marked a big step change for Dyer & Butler in rail as Chris explains: "It went beyond civils works and required us to provide a principal contractor's role with the turnkey delivery of multi-disciplinary work from the track realignment through to the lighting.

"The programme of works was delivered successfully and proved to be instrumental in changing the industry's perception of what Dyer & Butler can do; we are now seen as being more than a civils asset maintenance contractor – albeit a very good one! There is now a much broader acknowledgment of our wider complex project delivery capability.

"Anecdotally when I am talking with our clients, they are now referring to us as 'the new Dyer & Butler' which is good to hear. I'm proud of that badge."

Like all businesses, Dyer & Butler has had to adapt its working practices in light of the coronavirus pandemic.

Chris said: "Things basically had to change overnight. We were talking to all of our people and putting systems and processes in place to keep both them and customers safe, carrying out risk assessments and adapting new technologies.

"This has been an unsettling time for so many people and in so many ways, and the physical and mental health and wellbeing of our people has always been a huge priority for us. We recognised from the outset that strong communication and a comprehensive support network for our people would be crucial throughout.

"We have been resilient and the approach taken by the DfT and Network Rail has been very mature and supportive throughout, keeping the supply chain engaged and fed with work. Seeing the resilience of the

rail industry and the hard work going on makes me very proud to be part of this industry.

“We have had to become even more agile with our delivery approach and adapt working practices accordingly. We are fortunate that the majority of our work has continued and we’ve actually seen Network Rail taking the opportunity to bring works forward.

“The pandemic has been a difficult time for everyone and certainly one of the most challenging periods in my career. I’m really proud of how my team has adapted to these huge, evolving changes; I can’t thank them enough for their determination and commitment to safety during these times as they have all responded magnificently, working collaboratively with clients to ensure that works have continued to progress with the added consideration of social distancing measures to contend with.”

Despite the challenges of the Covid-19 period, Chris is optimistic for the future as Dyer & Butler continues to target new market opportunities and expand its geographical footprint.

“There are clearly going to be changes to the industry in the short term but the railway will remain a crucial part of the UK’s transport infrastructure network and we are seeing continued demand for our asset management and renewals expertise. Similarly, I can see many smaller enhancement schemes, such as platform extensions, continuing to progress as they will provide better capacity for the network to operate effectively which will be crucial for continued social distancing to ensure health and safety of us all.

“My goal is to continue to broaden the capability of the rail division and to ensure that Dyer & Butler continues to play a key role in keeping the country moving and supporting Network Rail with its goal of ‘Putting Passengers First’.”

*Dyer & Butler’s Rail Director Chris Darlow*