



DigEplan

Integrated electronic plan review

Case study Gemeente Noordenveld

Another Gemeente reaping the rewards of integrated EPermitting software from DigEplan.

Gemeente Noordenveld delivers savings of €48.000 per year, greater efficiency and significant process improvements.

Like it or not... the world is going paperless. Newspapers are now read on iPads, paperback books are read on Kindles... and emails are no longer printed off, but read on smartphones.

Bits and bytes are rapidly replacing printed paper. It's not only in the world of consumers where the paperless revolution is taking place.

Corporations large and small are embracing paperless environments, as are governments and gemeentes alike. One gemeente which has embraced the digital revolution with both hands is gemeente Noordenveld.

From their executives who use iPads for their day-to-day operations... through to their back-office functions

such as sending email invoices, collecting taxes online and extending services through Web forms, gemeente Noordenveld has long been at the forefront of paperless processing.

One area which was not fully paperless in the gemeente was building permits, but that changed in mid-2011 when three core drivers led gemeente Noordenveld to turn their traditional paper based building permit processes into digital processes.

“When we decided to go ‘Digital In / Digital Out’ with our building permits, DigEplan was the only choice for us... It really has made us more productive, more compliant, and reduced our use of printed paper”

Gemeente Noordenveld

The three challenges which led them to make this final paperless processing change were:

1. Legislative Changes

In October 2010, the central government of the Netherlands made it a requirement for all applicants, citizens and corporations, to make their request for building permits through a central portal known as the OLO.

This meant that from October 2010, all applicants had to upload the digital documents (i.e. building plans, drawings, correspondence and sectional designs) for their planning application into the central OLO.

The applicant's planning documents would then be assigned to the relevant gemeente to access, download and process.

2. Increased Financial Pressures

Like all gemeentes in the Netherlands, gemeente Noordenveld is under huge pressure to deliver more services with fewer resources. The central government is pushing additional services down to a local level at the same time as operating budgets are being squeezed.

Often retiring employees are not replaced, and there is a strong demand for gemeentes to be operationally more efficient and cost effective. Gemeente Noordenveld therefore needed to find ways to use technology to improve its operational efficiencies.



Gemeente Noordenveld has 240 users who can access DigEplan through a simple web-browser application. In addition to processing building permits, the gemeente is finding other valuable uses for DigEplan as other departments use it to quickly access any digital document stored in CORSA.

3. 8 or 26-Week Deadlines

Included in the legislation which required applicants to submit their applications through the OLO, gemeentes have to respond to the applicant within the 8 or 26 week deadline or face penalty.

These deadlines mean that gemeentes have to be efficient in the way they handle permit applications and their review by the various departments involved, such as Building, Fire, Environmental, Civil Engineering and Tax. In turn, the departments have to work on the same documents at the same time and be efficient in the way they process and respond to the applications.

Life Before Paperless Processing

Prior to making the switch to full paperless processing, the planning application procedure for gemeente Noordenveld was very paper intensive.

Multiple printed versions of a planning application would circulate throughout the gemeente, being sent to the various departments for review. Before the introduction of the OLO, applicants would send in multiple printed versions; after the introduction of the OLO, the gemeente would have to print off multiple versions of the planning application -- significantly increasing their printing costs.

Noordenveld had a real concern that with so many documents in circulation to the various stakeholders for review and comment, the whole planning process was prone to human error with documents going missing or becoming misplaced.

Also, with the pressure of the deadlines, it was important to issue the documents to the stakeholders and then back to the main case-officer quickly. Again there was a real concern that this time-pressure could possibly lead to documents being overlooked, planning applications perhaps not always receiving the consideration they needed, or perhaps judgments being made without all the correct and relevant information being available.

The Search For New Software

Gemeente Noordenveld knew they needed to find a software solution to help them go fully paperless when processing building planning applications, i.e. Digital in / Digital out.

Gemeente Noordenveld was already using CORSA as their document management system (DMS), case management system (CMS) and workflow system, but as good as CORSA is for document management and workflow, it does not provide all the required functionality needed for full 'digital in/digital out' processing of building applications – i.e. viewing digital documents, simultaneous collaboration, comments and mark-ups, stamping (red stamp), batch stamping, printing digital signatures, converting documents to PDF/A, and publishing final approved documents to the applicant's personal internet page.(PIP)

The ICT team quickly started a search for a software solution which could work alongside CORSA and provide the additional functionality and capability which was needed.

“DigEplan provides full integration into CORSA. The rich functionality gives us end-to-end support and allows us to meet our digital in / digital out demands”

Gemeente Noordenveld ICT Manager

The gemeente considered and discounted three main types of software which would allow them to go 'digital in / digital out' when processing building applications.

1. Free Document Viewers

Although CORSA has document viewing capability built into it, the viewing capability is somewhat limited.

If gemeente Noordenveld was going to be a full paperless environment, it needed all its users to have the ability to view documents, including drawings such as house designs, floor plans, sectional designs, etc.

Many planning documents which are submitted are in PDF format, and therefore a simple free PDF viewer was a possibility. However free document viewers offer no integration into CORSA and lack essential features such as stamping, mark-ups, real-time collaboration and publishing approved documents to the applicant's personal internet page.

2. Standalone (Unintegrated) Document Viewers

Also discounted as a solution were other 'enhanced viewers' which only offered PDF support, markup and collaboration functionality, but were not integrated into CORSA DMS and back office systems.

These alternative viewers require users to check out documents from the DMS and comment on them, and then check the document back into the DMS.

This left the gemeente wide open to documents being left on the users' desktops, or going missing whilst out in the various departments.

They realized they needed a viewing solution which would be fully integrated into CORSA and would allow users to work on documents in real-time, without having to check the documents out of the DMS or be forced to make copies of the original document.



Many 'power users' of DigEplan have dual screens. They have CORSA loaded on one screen, and DigEplan loaded on the other. The building inspector can even access DigEplan over 3G on his rugged laptop whilst on a building site.

3. E-Permitting Software solutions

Noordenveld also considered 'off the shelf' e-permitting solutions. However, as the gemeente Noordenveld was already using CORSA for its DMS and workflow, it was soon established that e-permitting software would duplicate much of the work done in CORSA, and users could be confused as to which piece of software they should be using.

Finding DigEplan

Finally in gemeente Noordenveld's search, members of the building permits team watched a presentation of DigEplan Paperless Permitting Software.

Their search was over and it was clear that DigEplan was the tool which would allow the gemeente to go fully paperless in the processing of building permits and achieve their goal of digital in / digital out.

Simply by clicking a link in CORSA, users could view all the related documents in CORSA, collaborate and mark-up the document with comments in real-time and without the need to check documents out of CORSA.

Users could stamp and batch stamp the documents once approved, and publish all approved documents to an applicant's personal internet page.

As well as accessing documents through CORSA, users could access documents directly through DigEplan web page or drill down from Stroomlijn, the gemeente's GIS software.

The ICT team was happy too, as DigEplan has a low IT overhead. DigEplan is a simple web application which runs on a web server and is accessed by end-users through a web browser.

This requires almost zero IT maintenance and made it easy for gemeente Noordenveld to deploy the software throughout the whole organization in less than a week.

Even outside of the gemeente, the building inspectors can use DigEplan through a 'rugged' laptop which is connected back to the gemeente through 3G.

This means the building inspector can immediately access any document for a building whilst on site.

This has had many advantages including the building inspector not having to print off documents before he travels to a building site, having access to ALL current and past documents, and being more flexible in which sites he visits in a day, as he does not first have to return to the gemeente to collect the printed papers.

Benefits of DigEplan

The principal benefits to gemeente Noordenveld of using DigEplan was saving time (fewer hours to complete a planning permit) and saving money (reduced printing costs - an A0 print can cost €10).

Additional benefits include:

1. Greater Compliance and Efficiency with Integration

Full integration into DMS, workflow and GIS systems such as BCT CORSA, Centic, DECOS and Circle Software's Verseon.

2. Improved Productivity with Rich Functionality

Full Functionality to meet gemeentes digital in / digital out needs, including:

- Document viewing
- Real-time 'multi-user' comments and mark-ups
- Stamping
- Batch stamping
- Digital signatures
- Publishing approved documents to applicant's personal internet page.

3. Improved Access to View any Document Online

Users can have online access to the complete history of past and present case documents

4. Rapid Implementation

Easy to implement system which uses web based architecture (front-end and back-end) and can be deployed in less than 1 week.

5. Less Paper and Clutter

Less paper and clutter on users' desks. DigEplan eliminates the need for printed paper and is a greener 'environmentally friendly' solution.

6. Support for Enterprise-Wide Usage

DigEplan can be used 'enterprise-wide' for a myriad of other document viewing uses

7. Fast Rename of Documents

Documents downloaded from the OLO can be renamed to meaningful file names, making it easier to retrieve digital documents.

8. Quickly Compare and Contrast

Easy compare and contrast functionality. Users can quickly check differences between two different sets of drawings.

9. Enables External Partners to Collaborate

Allows collaboration with external organizations. As well as internal employees, external partners can also use DigEplan.

10. View CAD Documents

Ability to view native CAD drawings (this is important for the future).

DigEplan supports over 240 employees in the gemeente with access to the software through a simple web page. DigEplan is not just being used for building permits but also for signing off documents and soon supporting the process of designing Cityplans.

"With the help of DigEplan, we are able to offer our citizens a much smoother, faster and more efficient planning permitting process. We've also saved money and time by integrating to our existing IT investments, and our employees are more efficient as DigEplan has freed up time to work on value add services."

Executive of Gemeente Noordenveld

Highlights

Building inspectors:

Through the process of going digital with building permits and having the documents available at the site of a build, the use of DigEplan has saved 36 hours a week on administration that was needed to prepare all the paperwork for site and the subsequent filing of this data in various systems.

“So this means 1 person per year, 1400 hours per year times average €31.5 per hour makes a saving of €44,100 a year”

Dealing with Paper Vs Digital

Within our CORSA DMS we can instantly access drawings using DigEplan;

Our old procedure with paper based drawings was to request a retrieval from our archive and then we would have to wait.

One you have the paper based dossier you have to fold open big drawings to check what you need which takes a lot more time and is very inefficient.

“Average time saving – 15 minutes per dossier with a minimum of 400 dossiers per year is 100 hours x €39 = € 3.900 a year”

Taxes

Within DigEplan taking measurements is very efficient using the accurate measurement function, (especially with areas that have strange shapes) including the Calibration tool.

On paper based drawings you have to use a ruler and manually recalibrate the scale of the drawing!

“Not including the benefits outside of WABO, using DigePlan as an Enterprise Viewer, gemeente Noordenveld is saving €48,000 by going digital using DigePlan”

Other Gemeentes using DigEplan include: Gemeente Maastricht, Gemeente Emmen, Gemeente Dantumadiel, Gemeente Schijndel, Gemeente Velsen, Gemeente Coevorden, Gemeente Borger Ordoon, Gemeente Houten, Gemeente Waalwijk , Gemeente Ede, Gemeente Tilburg and many more.

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