CIVICA

Easy online access to planning applications for Waverley's residents

Seamless and responsive online planning portal used by Waverley Borough Council's residents and officers

Waverley
BOROUGH COUNCIL

When a member of the public wants information about a planning application in the Waverley area, they don't have to phone up, write a letter or visit the council's offices. Instead, they simply click on the 'Planning' tab on the council's website to access Civica's intuitive Digital360 Portal for Planning.

Based in a mainly rural area and serving a population of 123,300, Waverley Borough Council receives around 2,500 planning applications every year.

To make it easy for members of the public to view and comment on them, the council has rolled out a web portal powered by Civica's Digital360 Portal for Planning. Integration with the council's back-office planning system lets portal users see key information about every planning application.

Digital360 Portal keeps planning information secure online by complying with current standards and security models, including Cyber Essentials, PSN requirements, and the EU GDPR. "It's important that we can reassure our residents that

Benefits

▶ **Streamlined planning application access** and review for citizens and case officers

▶ **Reduced avoidable contact** by managing demand on services

▶ Comment publication **time reduced from 5 days to 24** hours

▶ **Tangible cost savings** and support for the council's paperlight strategy

▶ **Collaborative solution design process,** enabling Civica to benefit from Waverley's domain knowledge.

we take care of their data and they know it's in safe hands." says Paul Reeves, IT Project Manager at Waverley Borough Council.

Digital360 Portal for Planning is designed specifically for local authorities. A number of councils, including Waverley, contributed to its development and provided insight into the features and functionality that residents and officers need.

24/7

Drives channel shift with **24/7 access**

£

Delivered **tangible savings**

Improved operational **efficiencies**

"We're really satisfied with the Digital360 Portal solution. It gives residents and case officers rapid access to accurate planning information and documents online, at any time, using any device."

Paul Reeves, IT Project Manager, Waverley Borough Council

"The process was very collaborative. We tested the first release of Digital360 Portal for Planning – Planning and worked with Civica on refining it," says Paul. "The solution is reliable, easy to use and very flexible. For example, it was simple to customise it to match our own website branding."

Intuitive tools and features make reviewing easy

An important outcome from the collaboration was the development of a user-friendly measuring tool. "When residents look at a planning application, they generally want to know 'how high will it be?' and 'how close to me will it come?'," says Val Jacobi, Planning Services Technical Team Leader at Waverley Borough Council. "The measuring tool on the portal makes it so easy to work this out, no-one ever has to ask for help."

It's also straightforward to find a specific document relating to an application, even when several hundred are attached. Instead of having to page through multiple screens to find the right one, users can sort documents in alphabetical order or by date; or filter them by document type, such as decision notice or flood risk. "The filter is very intuitive," says Val. "As soon as you begin typing, the portal starts refining the list, so you soon find the document you want."

Online commenting meets residents' expectations

Perhaps the biggest step forward with the portal solution is that members of the public can now comment on applications online. Previously, comments had to be sent by letter or email. Reviewing, approving and scanning them onto the website typically took five days – leading to complaints that comments were slow to appear.

"Residents used to complain that their comments were slow to appear on the web. Now, approved comments are generally made live within 24 hours of being submitted. We know residents are satisfied as we're getting far fewer complaints."

Val Jacobi, Planning Services Technical Team Leader, Waverley Borough Council

In addition, comments received near the end of the representation period might only be processed after the case officer had written the final report. "It wasn't very efficient, as the officer would have to go back and revise the report to take them into account," says Val.

Today, most comments are submitted via the portal and moderated by the council using workflow within the solution. When a new comment is submitted, the workflow alerts the planning team, who review it to check, among other things, that it relates to the right application and isn't defamatory.

"Approved comments are generally made live within 24 hours of being submitted," says Val. "Case officers can access them promptly, and we know residents are satisfied as we're getting far fewer complaints."

Support for a paper-reduction strategy

Digital360 Portal for Planning solution supports Waverley Borough Council's strategy to reduce the amount of paper it handles. Planning officers still receive large plans and drawings in printed form, but now access the associated documents on the portal. "The portal converts all documents to images, so anyone can view them on any device," says Paul.

Implementing the portal has also enabled Waverley to stop sending printed copies of new planning applications to most of the 21 town and parish councils in the area. "On top of the printing costs, each weekly package cost around £12 to post, so the savings soon add up," says Val. "Doing away with all that admin also means we're saving the equivalent of one person's time every week."

Besides that, the planning team is archiving much less paper. All the paper documents relating to every planning application are scanned into the Civica Documents (EDM) application and validated through the solutions workflow.

Paper copies would have been kept for 2 years but are now destroyed once the application is approved. "Reducing our paper mountain generally lets us make better use of storage space by repurposing it for offices," says Val.

In addition to planning, Digital360 Portal for Planning solution can be used in many other business areas within local government. "Our successful deployment for planning means we'll consider the solution for other parts of the Council if and when there is a requirement," says Paul.