



Park Central, Birmingham.
Image courtesy of Crest Nicholson.

CUSTOMER CASE STUDY

Crest Nicholson Plc

THE CHALLENGE

An Ever-Changing Market and Demand for Long-Range Planning

Crest Nicholson have been building new homes for over 50 years, focusing on the Southern half of the UK. They are established as a leading developer of sustainable housing, apartments and mixed use communities.

Led by Paul Thurlow, Business Intelligence Manager, the BI Team at Crest Nicholson faced a number of challenges.

The housing market is particularly susceptible to changes in demand. These variations are driven by a number of factors such as interest rates, government schemes such as Help to Buy, and the overall cyclical nature of the market as a whole. It was imperative that Crest were able to plan ahead for future changes in the market.

“There’s been a huge amount of pressure put on the BI team for planning into the future better,” noted Paul, **“so, for example, taking information and seeing what it’s going to look like 20 years ahead is something that the board are increasingly pushing for.”**

Business Requirements

Some of the key drivers for change and development within the Business Intelligence team at Crest Nicholson, included:

- An overarching strategy to move IT systems to the cloud where possible
- A generalised push for more data on demand, and near real time reporting
- An increasing need for mobile data solutions
- An increasing appetite for data from additional departments in the business, beyond the traditional user base of Finance

“Sempre challenged our requirements on this project. By challenging us they made us think in slightly broader terms – this then gave us a richer solution.”

– Paul Thurlow

THE RESULTS

- A scalable, future-proofed Financial and Operational Planning application, which allows for rapid changes
- Plot level Planning and Management Reporting with fully integrated Cash Flow, P&L and Balance Sheets
- Better understanding of Complex Build Projects and their Financial Impact on Division and Organisation
- Quicker Month-End Close and Reduced Manual Intervention
- Up-to-Date information – data is fed in to the data warehouse every 10 minutes for Pixel-Perfect Executive Reporting
- Application allows for detailed Scenario planning and What-If analysis
- Planning application owned by Finance, but used operationally across the business
- Better dissemination of data throughout the business

Selecting a New Planning Solution

It was becoming apparent that Crest’s existing planning tool was not evolving as the business evolved. With a growing demand for information and a user-base with a variety of needs, Crest Nicholson decided to make the change to a new, cloud-based planning tool and sought our assistance to help move them forward.

“Knowing we had to change our planning tool, we started to look at the market to see what technologies were available. Our long-standing relationship with Sempre coupled with their deep understanding of our business, meant they were able to bring a number of technologies to us. They then demonstrated them and helped us through the process of reviewing and understanding what each of them was able to deliver to us,” Paul said.

THE SOLUTION Plot Level Planning System

Once Crest had selected their new planning tool, Sempre Analytics worked closely with the BI team to ensure a smooth migration process across from the incumbent platform, to their new, cloud-based planning tool. Being able to input data at individual house or plot level, and automatically see this aggregate at all levels of the business (e.g. site, project, phase, division and right up to group level) was fundamental to the successful adoption of the new planning tool, and the development of Crest's plot level planning system.

A key element of this project was to ensure the new planning tool was successfully integrated with the existing BI environment and systems.

"Sempre provided us with a huge amount of confidence throughout the integration process. They had a deep understanding of the ERP and CRM systems we already had in place and ensured as easy a transition and integration as we could have hoped for," said Paul.

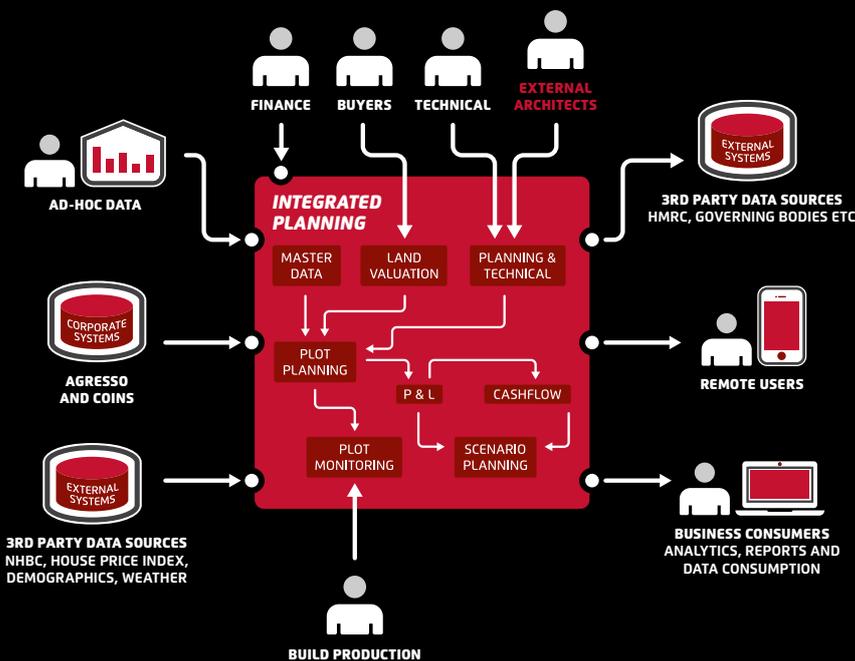
"By further integrating our plot level planning system with cash flow, P&L and balance sheets, and combining it with information from our data warehouse, we have been able to produce comprehensive board packs and reports for key business stake holders," he added.

Management Information – The Bigger Picture

Alongside the adoption of their new planning tool, the BI team also needed to address the growing data needs of the wider organisation. Historically, around 85% of the demands made on the BI team came from the Finance department. Over the previous 12 months, they had seen an increasing appetite for data from HR, Customer Service, Sales & Marketing, and Production.

By using IBM Cognos Data Manager as their main ETL tool, our Cognos experts assisted Crest with the feed of data from various other internal systems, such as Coins (CRM system), Agresso (ERP system) Anaplan and ResourceLink (HR system), into the data warehouse. Working closely with the BI team we also developed feeds into their BI environment from other external sources such as New House Builder Survey data.

By pulling data from both internal and external sources into one central data warehouse, Crest were able to present a single, accurate view of their data, and to easily distribute relevant data to departments within the organisation.



"We're now considering pushing our planning tool out into other areas of the business, which is something we would never have considered doing with our previous planning application."

– Paul Thurlow

THE FUTURE

More Data and Increased Knowledge

As the appetite for data in the business continues to grow, Crest Nicholson are now turning their attention to new deployments and further use of data throughout the business. Increased use of dashboarding, visualisations, plot site maps and mobilising data are all capabilities they intend to explore further.

“The next step for our planning tool is to extend its reach to encompass land valuations, scenario planning and sustainability planning,” says Paul. **“In addition to this, we want to take advantage of tools we’ve not yet adopted such as SPSS for predictive analytics, for example when assessing our prospects or keeping an eye on our return from marketing spend.”**

“Working with the guys at Sempre has been like working with an extension of the team here at Crest. They are dynamic and work with our ever-changing requirements; never shying away from a challenge.”

– Paul Thurlow



Noble Park, Epsom.
Image courtesy of Crest Nicholson.

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