

THE LIVE PROGRAMME GUIDE

How to build and run a construction programme that finishes the job. The craft, the priorities, and the full checklist.



Construction's most expensive mistake is the **one nobody is taught to fix.**

Ask construction people what causes delay and they give the same answer they have given every survey for a decade. Not the weather, not money, not a difficult client. The plan.

In a 2022 UK industry survey, 31.4 per cent named poor original planning and unrealistic scheduling as the number one reason projects run late. It was the top answer in 2016 too, and it had barely moved in between. In the same survey, 91 per cent of respondents had been involved in a delayed project. (Cornerstone Projects, 2022.)

This is not only what people feel. It is what the data finds when somebody measures it. In a 26 month programme reported in 2026, the Get It Right Initiative and CITB worked across 25 live UK projects worth 942.5 million pounds and tracked where avoidable error came from. Inadequate planning was, in their words, by far the biggest cause. Of the 92.6 million pounds of error the programme headed off, 71.2 million pounds came from eliminating errors caused by inadequate planning. Roughly three quarters of the waste, by value, traced back to the plan. (GIRI and CITB, 2026.)

Across the whole industry, GIRI estimates avoidable error costs up to 25 billion pounds a year, around 21 per cent of total project value. (GIRI, 2025.)

None of this is new. Sir Michael Latham called the industry adversarial and fragmented in 1994 and set a target of cutting cost by 30 per cent. Sir John Egan told it to do things differently in 1998. Ten years on, Egan marked the industry about four out of ten. Reviewing progress in 2009, the verdict in the foreword to the Wolstenholme report was blunt: since 1998 we could have had a revolution, and what we achieved was a bit of improvement. The diagnosis has been right for thirty years. The knowledge of what good looks like has existed the whole time. What is missing is people who can take it onto a live job and make it happen.

How to use this guide. This guide is the craft, written down. It is given away in full because a method you can read and use is the best proof it is real. Use it whether or not you ever pick up the phone.

A programme is **live, or it is dead.**

The bid programme is a snapshot, built on assumptions, before the team, the design and the site are known. The moment work starts, it begins to drift from reality. From there it is bang, crash.

A live programme is the opposite. It is a tool you run the job with, not a document you reach for once it has gone wrong. It is logic linked, so every activity knows what it depends on. It is updated at least monthly to record actual progress, changes of method and sequence, and any extensions of time. And because the logic holds, you can model the impact of a change, a variation, a late information release, a re-sequence, before anyone commits to it, not after. (SCL Delay and Disruption Protocol, 2nd edition, 2017.)

The Society of Construction Law puts the commercial case plainly. An outdated programme hinders any assessment of the critical path, of float consumed, and of the effect of a delay event. A dead programme is not just unhelpful. It is a liability, and it weakens your position in exactly the argument it was supposed to win.

There is a deeper point underneath the mechanics. A programme is a communication device, and the people are what turn it into a building. The labourer, the supervisor, the site manager, the designer and the client each need to see something different before they can act. A programme that lives in one head, or in software only the planner opens, is not live. It is hidden.

The three mistakes I have **seen most**

I have spent over twenty years building, fifteen of them on site, and I have made or watched most of the mistakes there are to make on a programme. Three come up again and again, and every one of them has become more expensive, not less, under the Building Safety Act. If you fix nothing else, fix these three.

MISTAKE ONE

Starting on site with the design and procurement unfinished

For years the industry let the design develop into construction. You started on site, then procured the specialist packages, the M&E, the facade, the structure, and finished the technical design as you went. On a higher-risk building that is now against the law. Gateway 2 is a hard stop. You cannot begin construction until the Building Safety Regulator has approved a design that demonstrates compliance, and starting without it is a criminal offence. (gov.uk.)

The design that goes in has to be frozen and construction-ready, the level you would expect at the end of RIBA Stage 4. Once it is approved you cannot quietly change it. A major change means stopping work and going back to the Regulator for re-approval, up to six weeks, and as much as twelve weeks lost if it sits on the critical path. (gov.uk; Charles Russell Speechlys.)

The fix. Procure the specialist technical design, the M&E, the facade and the structure, during Stage 4, so the design is genuinely complete and coordinated at the end of Stage 4 before it goes in as the Gateway 2 submission and on into Stage 5. Bring the contractor and the specialists in early, often on a pre-construction services agreement, and freeze a design you can actually build. On any job this is good practice. On a higher-risk building it is the difference between starting and not starting.

MISTAKE TWO

Thinking the job is finished when the building is finished

Practical completion used to be the end. You finished the building, handed it over, and people moved in. On a higher-risk building, finishing the building is no longer the same as being allowed to use it. Gateway 3 means the building must be genuinely complete, fully commissioned, tested and certificated, with the systems proven to work together, before you even apply for the completion certificate. Applications made with the commissioning unfinished, fire suppression not working at the inspection, are being rejected. (Charles Russell Speechlys.)

Then the Regulator has eight weeks to decide, and often longer in practice, before the building is registered and anyone can lawfully move in. Occupying before that is a criminal offence carrying up to two years. (Building Safety Act 2022, sections 76 and 77.) There is now a mandatory gap of weeks to months between a building being physically finished and being lawfully occupied, and it sits outside your control. One analysis put it plainly: a six-month delay at Gateway 3 can mean six months of lost rent, far more than any damages you would recover from a contractor. (Axiom Bridge.)

The fix. Programme the end-game as its own block. Fully finish, commission and certificate, then allow the eight-week-plus Regulator wait, then registration, then occupation. Do not commit a handover, sales or letting date that depends on a certificate you do not yet hold. If you need to occupy in stages, that partial completion has to be designed in at Gateway 2, not improvised at the end.

MISTAKE THREE

Starting the job without planning **how you will finish it**

The third is the oldest and the most human. People set the site up and start work without having thought the whole sequence through to the finish, including how they get off the job at the end. The discipline is to begin with the end in mind, and plan backwards from completion and commissioning, the way pull planning does, so the finish drives the sequence rather than the sequence stumbling toward a finish. Commissioning is not an afterthought, and it is the part of the programme that always gets squeezed. (BSRIA; Last Planner.)

A few specifics catch people every time. Where you put the cabins and the compound: I would finish the groundworks under a compound before I sited my welfare on it, rather than build on top of unfinished work and double-handle my own facilities later. Welfare has to be there from day one under CDM 2015, so plan where it sits against the permanent works, not just where it is convenient on the first morning.

Get the plant rooms and the vertical service risers in as early as humanly possible. Everything downstream, the distribution on every floor, the fit-out, the commissioning, hangs off them, so if they are late the whole back end of the job compresses into the commissioning window, which is the worst place to lose time. In my experience the single most common cause of delay on a UK job right now is the service risers and the M&E coordination around them. No survey names risers specifically, but every serious study of delay puts design coordination, late information and clashes at the very top, and the riser is exactly where those failures bite. Mechanical and electrical work is 30 to 40 per cent of a commercial building's cost, and most of it funnels through those shafts.

And get the building watertight early. Weathertightness is a milestone worth driving hard for, because it releases the internal trades onto the critical path, and temporary weatherproofing can be used deliberately to bring that date forward. (SteelConstruction.info; Designing Buildings.) Decide the direction of travel through the building, up or down and around, and how each trade hands over to the next, before you start, not as you go.

The fix. Before a spade is in the ground, walk the whole job backwards from handover. How the services get into the building, how it gets finished, how it gets commissioned, and how you leave the premises, including taking your own welfare off it. The plan that finishes a job is written before the job starts.

The top 10 programming priorities

If you read nothing else, read this. These are the ten things that most determine whether a job finishes on time. The full checklist that follows builds each of them out, phase by phase.

- 1 Win the time before a spade is in the ground.**
A month gained in pre-construction is worth several on site. Front-load the design, bring the contractor and key trades in early, and start with the date already protected.

- 2 Carry a real, protected buffer.**
Hold a deliberate terminal float, commonly in the order of 5 to 10 per cent, won in preconstruction and the first third of the works, and defend it like it is made of gold.

- 3 Build the programme in the room.**
Write it with the key trades and designers physically present. A plan mandated down the chain does not produce buy-in. It produces claims.

- 4 Keep it live, or it is dead.**
Update at least monthly against actual progress. Use the logic to model a change before you commit to it, not after.

- 5 Flush out the long-lead items on day one.**
Switchgear, transformers, lifts, facade and bespoke plant now run to many months. Identify and order them at the front, not when the frame is up.

- 6 Programme the statutory gates as real activities.**
Planning, discharge of conditions and the Building Safety Act gateways each have a duration and a queue. Draw them in with float, do not assume them.

- 7 Plan to finish, not to fight.**
Build the programme to deliver the job, not to build the record for a claim. Teams who plan this way rarely need the claim.

- 8 Communicate in the right form for each audience.**
A Gantt for managers, a short look-ahead and a list for site managers, pictures and logistics boards for the trades.

- 9 Give commissioning and handover their own time.**
Commissioning, integrated systems testing and handover get squeezed at the end. Programme them properly, and book seasonal commissioning in.

- 10 React well to bad news, or you stop hearing it.**
The early warning is only as good as the culture. The moment you shout at the person who flags a slip is the moment they stop flagging it.

How a programme is built

Behind a good programme sits a small body of technique that the best planners use and the rest were never taught. None of it is exotic. All of it is learnable.

Logic, the critical path and float. A programme is a network of activities linked by logic, not a list of bars. The longest path of dependent activities through that network is the critical path, and it sets the completion date. Float is the room an activity has before it starts to push that date. Total float within the network is shared and can absorb the effect of events. Terminal float, the gap between when you plan to finish and the date you must finish by, is the protected buffer that keeps the whole job safe.

Buffer and time risk allowance. Float is not slack to be silently spent. The discipline is to declare it. Under NEC, time risk allowances are contingencies the contractor builds into individual activity durations for its own risks, weather, ground, supply, and they are owned by the contractor. A programme with no allowance, or with all of it bunched at the end, is regarded as not realistic. Carry the buffer deliberately, show it, and defend it. A common practitioner rule of thumb is a protected terminal float in the order of 5 to 10 per cent of the remaining duration, won early and held.

Optimism is not a personality trait, it is a measurable error. People underestimate how long their own work will take, even when similar work has always run long. Psychologists call it the planning fallacy. In the classic study, students estimated their thesis at 33.9 days on average and took 55.5; only about a third finished inside their own estimate. (Buehler, Griffin and Ross, 1994.) Government has priced this in. The HM Treasury Green Book instructs appraisers to add explicit optimism bias uplifts to early estimates, then reduce them only as risks are demonstrably managed.

Project type	Works duration uplift	Capital cost uplift
Standard buildings	4%	24%
Non-standard buildings	39%	51%
Standard civil engineering	20%	44%
Non-standard civil engineering	25%	66%
Equipment and development	54%	200%

These are the upper-bound uplifts applied at outline business case. The method starts at the upper bound and works down toward a lower bound only as contributory risks are mitigated. (HM Treasury Green Book, Supplementary Guidance on Optimism Bias.) Read the table as a warning: the date you were first given is probably wrong, and wrong in the same direction every time.

The honest version, and the dishonest one. Bent Flyvbjerg, who has studied overruns longer than almost anyone, separates honest optimism from strategic misrepresentation, the deadline quietly understated to win the work or get the scheme approved. Around nine in ten major projects overrun. His cure is reference class forecasting: estimate from the actual outturn of comparable completed jobs, the outside view, rather than the inside view of the job in hand. The UK Department for Transport adopted it as guidance in 2004.

Plan it in the room

Almost every good programme, and especially every recovery, is written with the key trades and designers physically present. The technique that makes this work has a name and an evidence base.

The Last Planner System. Developed by Glenn Ballard and Greg Howell, it shifts planning from a single planner issuing a programme to the people who will actually do the work committing to it. It runs as a sequence of connected conversations: what should happen (the master and phase plan, pulled back from a milestone with the trades), what can happen (a look-ahead of roughly six to eight weeks that removes constraints so work is ready), what will happen (a weekly work plan of specific promises), what did happen, and what we learn from the misses. The measure is Percent Plan Complete, the share of the week's planned tasks actually finished.

Why the weekly plan matters. On a traditional site, only about 54 per cent of the work planned for a given week actually gets done. The weekly plan, the thing the whole job runs on, is close to a coin toss. Raising that number is what makes a programme flow. (Lean Construction Institute; Ballard and Howell.)

Location and rhythm. For repetitive work, floors, units, zones, a line of balance view plots production rate and location and exposes trade stacking and idle crews that a Gantt hides. Takt planning sets a fixed rhythm for crews moving through zones. Both are ways of planning for flow rather than for a date.

Adoption is the gap, not the idea. UK take-up of this kind of collaborative planning is thin. One UK study found only about 19 per cent of respondents using the Last Planner System, with lack of awareness, understanding and training the main barriers. The cure exists. Most of the industry has never been taught to take it.

Design, procurement and the long lead

The programme does not start at the site gate. By the time work begins, the decisions that govern whether it finishes on time have mostly already been made, in design and procurement.

The RIBA Plan of Work 2020 sets out eight stages: 0 Strategic Definition, 1 Preparation and Briefing, 2 Concept Design, 3 Spatial Coordination, 4 Technical Design, 5 Manufacturing and Construction, 6 Handover, and 7 Use. The procurement route does not change the work, but it strongly influences when design information is produced and is, in RIBA's words, influential in determining the project programme. Stage 4 is the most complex to navigate, because the route dictates when information for specialist subcontractors is released.

Two practical disciplines follow. First, bring specialist supply-chain experience in at Stage 2 to 3. Common sense on a programme is really just experience that has not been written down yet. Get the groundworker, the facade and the commissioning specialist round the table early, test the design against buildability and the long lead, and a tried and tested supply chain will often give that advice for free. Second, run a live information release schedule and procurement schedule, so the date each package of information and each long-lead order is needed is on the programme, owned, and visible.

The principle that a month won in pre-construction is worth several on site is a practitioner rule of thumb, but its underpinnings are sound. The MacLeamy curve shows the cost of a change rising and your ability to influence it falling as the job proceeds; once on site, change becomes exponentially more expensive. Early contractor involvement studies report savings in the order of 10 per cent of construction time and 7 per cent of cost. And RIBA is explicit that overlapping Technical Design with Construction to start sooner trades away price certainty and increases rework. The speed you buy by starting with incomplete design is usually paid back, with interest, in site disruption.

THE FULL CHECKLIST

Run the job **against this**

What follows is the programme checklist in full, phase by phase, from pre-construction to aftercare. Tick only what is honestly true today. Empty boxes are where your next risk is sitting.

The phases overlap in practice, and the contract and Building Safety Act gates that sit across them are pulled out into their own sections afterwards. The items flagged in orange are the three mistakes from the front of this guide, carried through to where they bite. Use this as a working document. Print it, mark it up, and bring it to the planning meeting.

PHASE 1

Pre-construction and design

- ☐ **The brief and the date are real.** You have tested the completion date against comparable completed jobs, not just accepted the tender date. Optimism bias has been named and allowed for.
- ☐ **Design and specialist procurement complete by end of Stage 4.** The technical design, including the M&E, facade and structure, is procured and coordinated during Stage 4 so it is genuinely complete before start on site. For a higher-risk building this is what Gateway 2 demands. **Andy's mistake one.**
- ☐ **Key trades and designers engaged early.** Specialist buildability and sequencing advice taken at RIBA Stage 2 to 3, not discovered on site.
- ☐ **Long-lead register is open and owned.** Switchgear, transformers, lifts, facade, bespoke plant identified, with current supplier lead times and order-by dates on the programme.
- ☐ **Information release schedule is live.** Every design information package has a needed-by date driven by the construction sequence, not the other way round.
- ☐ **Planning permission and conditions are programmed.** Determination and discharge of pre-commencement conditions are shown as activities with realistic durations and float, not assumed.
- ☐ **Gateway 1 addressed where in scope.** For higher-risk buildings, the fire statement and planning-stage fire requirements are in hand.

PHASE 2

Mobilisation and getting the programme right

- ☐ **Built in the room.** The programme was written collaboratively with the supply chain present, and they have genuinely signed up to it.
- ☐ **Logic linked and resourced.** Activities are linked by dependency with method and resources behind them, not a picture of bars.
- ☐ **A protected buffer is in, and shown.** Terminal float and time risk allowances are declared on the programme, in the order of 5 to 10 per cent, and defended.
- ☐ **Accepted Programme submitted.** Under NEC, a first programme showing the clause 31.2 information has been submitted for acceptance. You are not exposed to the 25 per cent retention.
- ☐ **Gateway 2 is on the critical path with contingency.** For higher-risk buildings, building control approval before construction is programmed with realistic time, well beyond the statutory minimum.

- ☐ **Each audience has its own view.** A Gantt for managers, a look-ahead and list for site managers, pictures and logistics boards for trades are all in use.

PHASE 3

Plan the finish before you start

- ☐ **You have planned backwards from the finish.** The handover and commissioning end-state drives the build sequence, not the other way round. Pull planning, worked back from each milestone with the trades. **Andy's mistake three.**
- ☐ **Site set-up serves the finish, not just day one.** Cabins, compound and welfare are sited against the permanent works, with the groundworks under a compound finished first where possible, to avoid building on unfinished work and double-handling. Welfare is in from day one under CDM 2015.
- ☐ **Plant rooms and service risers are programmed early.** The vertical risers and the plant they feed are built and closed out as early as possible, because distribution, fit-out and commissioning all hang off them. Late risers compress the whole back end into the commissioning window. **The most common delay Andy sees.**
- ☐ **Watertight is an early, named milestone.** A weathertight date is set and driven, because it releases the internal trades onto the critical path. Temporary weatherproofing is used deliberately to bring it forward.
- ☐ **The direction of travel is decided.** How you work through the building, up or down and around, and how each trade hands over to the next, is agreed before the start, not improvised on site.

PHASE 4

Construction and keeping it live

- ☐ **Updated at least monthly.** Actual progress, changed methods and sequences and any extensions of time are recorded against the baseline every month.
- ☐ **Look-ahead and weekly work plan are running.** A six to eight week make-ready look-ahead removes constraints; a weekly work plan captures specific commitments; Percent Plan Complete is measured.
- ☐ **Change is modelled before it is committed.** Variations and re-sequences are impacted into the live logic to see the effect on completion before anyone agrees them.
- ☐ **Early warnings are raised and acted on.** Anything that could delay completion or a key date is notified early and recorded, and the culture rewards the messenger.
- ☐ **The buffer is being defended, not quietly spent.** Float consumption is tracked. You know how much terminal float remains and what has eaten it.
- ☐ **Records are a by-product of running it well.** Progress records, the accepted baseline and updates are kept as a matter of course, ready if a claim ever forms.

PHASE 5

Commissioning and integrated systems testing

- ☐ **Commissioning has real time, not the scraps.** Commissioning, witnessing and integrated systems testing are programmed as distinct activities with duration, not compressed into the final fortnight.
- ☐ **Integrated systems testing is planned.** Systems are tested together under simulated scenarios such as power loss and fire, to prove the coordinated cause-and-effect response, not just that each system passes alone.

- ☐ **Seasonal commissioning is booked in.** Heating, cooling and ventilation are committed to be proven in the right season, across the first 12 months of occupation, with a commissioning manager named.

- ☐ **Standards are named and followed.** BSRIA Soft Landings BG 54/2018 and the relevant CIBSE Commissioning Codes (A air, C controls, M management, W water and others) are specified.

PHASE 6

Handover and practical completion

- ☐ **You know what practical completion really means.** PC is sufficient completion for beneficial occupation with only trifling defects outstanding. A more-than-trifling patent defect prevents it, even if it could later be fixed. (Mears v Costplan, 2019.)

- ☐ **The handover information is built through the job, not at the end.** O&M; manuals, the building manual and user guide, as-built and BIM information are assembled as you go.

- ☐ **The Health and Safety File is ready.** Under CDM 2015 the principal designer compiles the file of residual risks for future work, handed to the client at completion.

- ☐ **Golden thread handed over where in scope.** For higher-risk buildings the as-built safety information is complete and transferred to the Accountable Person. Failure to transfer it is a criminal offence.

- ☐ **The building is fully finished and commissioned before Gateway 3 is applied for.** For a higher-risk building, commissioning, testing and certification must be complete before the completion certificate application. Applications made with the commissioning unfinished are being rejected. **Andy's mistake two.**

- ☐ **The eight-week wait and registration sit in the programme before occupation.** After submission the Regulator has eight weeks or more to decide, then the building must be registered, and only then can anyone lawfully move in. Occupying before that is a criminal offence. Handover, sales and letting dates are not committed until the certificate is in hand.

- ☐ **Building Regulations completion certificate obtained.** The separate statutory sign-off, distinct from PC, that permits lawful occupation.

PHASE 7

Defects, retention and aftercare

- ☐ **The rectification period and retention are understood.** Typically a 12 month rectification period and around 3 per cent retention, half released at PC and the balance on making good defects.

- ☐ **Aftercare is resourced.** Soft Landings aftercare keeps the design and delivery team involved after handover to tune the building and close out performance gaps.

- ☐ **Post-occupancy evaluation is planned.** Under Government Soft Landings, formal reviews at roughly 12, 24 and 36 months capture whether the building actually performs, and the lessons for the next job.

- ☐ **Seasonal commissioning is completed in aftercare.** Fine-tuning across the full annual weather cycle is finished within the extended aftercare window.

The Building Safety Act and **your programme**

For higher-risk buildings the Building Safety Act 2022 has added two gates to the programme that did not exist before, and both can stop the job. They must be drawn in as real activities with real durations, not assumed.

A higher-risk building is at least 18 metres tall or has at least 7 storeys, and contains at least two residential units. The regime runs through three gateways: Gateway 1 at planning, where a fire statement is required and the HSE is a statutory consultee; Gateway 2 before construction, where the Building Safety Regulator must grant building control approval of the design before any work starts; and Gateway 3 before occupation, where the Regulator must issue a completion certificate and the building must be registered. You cannot lawfully start without Gateway 2, and it is a criminal offence to occupy without Gateway 3.

The gap between the statutory targets and reality is the single most important thing to programme for.

Gateway	Statutory target	Real-world position, 2026
Gateway 2 (new build)	12 weeks	Median around 22 weeks; complex cases 33 weeks or more. Only the batched fast-track route reliably hits 12 weeks.
Gateway 2 (refurb / works)	8 weeks	Routinely longer; remediation cases ran to a median near 39 weeks.
Gateway 3 (completion)	8 weeks	Plus registration before occupation. Treat as a gating activity, not a formality.

Before the mid-2025 reforms, worst-case Gateway 2 waits reached around 48 weeks in London, roughly four times the target, and some schemes fell 12 to 18 months behind. On 30 June 2025 the government announced a reform package: a new fast-track process bringing inspector and engineer capacity in-house, new leadership under Andy Roe as chair and Charlie Pugsley as chief executive, and a plan to move the Regulator out of the HSE into an executive agency, a step toward a single construction regulator. Times have improved but still sit above the statutory floor. (gov.uk; Building Safety Regulator data, 2026.)

Gateway 2 is a design freeze. The approved design is the design you build. Any major change means stopping work and going back to the Regulator, so the technical design and its procurement, the M&E, the facade, the structure, have to be finished during RIBA Stage 4 before you submit. Late or uncoordinated design, especially M&E and facade, is the common reason applications are rejected.

Gateway 3 is not a formality at the end. The building must be genuinely complete, fully commissioned, tested and certificated before you apply, and applications made with the commissioning unfinished are being turned away. The certificate, the eight-week-plus wait and the registration then sit between completion and occupation, all outside your control, so a building can be physically finished and still not lawfully occupied. (gov.uk; Charles Russell Speechlys; Axiom Bridge.)

The programming rule. Programme Gateway 2 with the prudent planning assumption of around 22 weeks for a standard new build, not the 12-week target, plus time to resubmit if the application is rejected. Front-load the golden thread information, because incomplete information is a common cause of rejection. Do not commit a start-on-site or an occupation date that depends on a gateway you do not yet hold.

The programme under **NEC** and **JCT**

The two main UK contract suites treat the programme very differently. Knowing which one you are on, and what it asks of the programme, is part of the craft.

	NEC4 ECC	JCT (2016 / 2024)
Status of programme	The Accepted Programme is central. Clause 31.2 prescribes what it must show: completion and key dates, planned Completion, the order and timing of operations, float, time risk allowances and method.	The master programme is referenced once (clause 2.9.1.2). It is not a contract document and adds nothing to the contractor's obligations. The only binding date is the Completion Date.
Keeping it current	Clause 32 requires revised programmes showing actual progress and how delays and defects will be handled.	No duty to work to, or revise, the programme except a revised programme following an extension of time.
Float ownership	Terminal float and time risk allowances are owned by the contractor. Total float in the network is shared and absorbs compensation events.	Not addressed by the contract. Float treatment is left to analysis and case law.
Early warning	A duty to give early warning, an Early Warning Register, and early warning meetings (clause 15).	No early-warning duty, register or meeting, even in the 2024 edition.
Delay assessment	Prospective, against the Accepted Programme: the delay to planned Completion shown on the current accepted programme (clause 63.5).	Extension of time for Relevant Events; the 2024 edition cut the assessment window from 12 to 8 weeks.
The stick	No first programme with the required information means the Project Manager retains a quarter of the Price for Work Done to Date.	Liquidated damages run from the Completion Date once a non-completion certificate is issued.

Both suites, read properly, are on the side of the planner. The Society of Construction Law Delay and Disruption Protocol states that its purpose is to help parties avoid unnecessary disputes, and that the programme should first be a tool for monitoring progress and only second a way of working out entitlement. Good records and good use of the programme, it notes, reduce uncertainty, improve the ability to manage progress, and allow early assessment of claims, which reduces disputes. The records are the by-product of running the job well. (SCL Protocol, 2nd edition, 2017.)

The cost of ignoring this is visible in the numbers. UK adjudication referrals reached a record 2,264 in the year to April 2024, with inadequate contract administration named the leading cause of dispute. A whole industry exists to win the fight after the event. The point of a live programme is to make sure the fight never starts. (King's College London and the Adjudication Society, 2024.)

REFERENCE

Durations to programme honestly

Realistic durations, drawn from current UK sources. Where the real-world figure differs from the statutory or theoretical one, both are shown. Confirm long-lead items with named suppliers at tender, because they move.

STATUTORY APPROVALS

Activity	Statutory period	Reality
Planning, minor	8 weeks	Only about 42% decided within 8 weeks; most rely on an agreed extension of time.
Planning, major	13 weeks	Only about 20% within 13 weeks; around 91% 'in time' via extensions. Budget 16 to 26 weeks if complex or going to committee.
Planning with EIA	16 weeks	Longer in practice; validation alone can take up to 4 weeks before the clock starts.
Discharge of conditions	8 weeks	Pre-commencement conditions must be cleared before a lawful start. A frequent cause of delayed starts.
Building Regs, Full Plans	5 weeks	Extendable to 2 months by agreement. Building Notice route allows a start 2 working days after submission.

LONG-LEAD ITEMS, 2025 TO 2026

Electrical plant is the critical path on many current jobs, as data-centre and electrification demand soaks up manufacturing slots. Treat switchgear as a day-one procurement item.

Item	Indicative lead time	Note
MV switchgear	25 to 100 weeks	Range reflects market and specification. Order early, freeze the design.
Power transformers	16 to 32 weeks	Large HV units far longer, reported beyond 100 weeks.
Generators	40 to 45 weeks	Often longer on contractor reports.
Chillers / AHUs	12 to 32 weeks	Bespoke and liquid-cooling units at the top of the range.
Lifts, facade, steel	Confirm with supplier	Classically long-lead and easily overlooked. Glass availability swings facade. Verify current quotes, do not rely on old baselines.

FRAME AND BUILD RATES, RULES OF THUMB

Element	Typical rate	Source / note
Steel erection	Around 100 tonnes per week	Releasing over 1,200 m ² of metal deck per week, single hook. (SteelConstruction.info / SCI.)
Steel vs concrete frame	16 vs 28 weeks (worked example)	Steel frame and floors against post-tensioned concrete: a 12-week frame saving in the SCI example.
In-situ concrete frame	About one storey per week	Jumpform cores on a 5 to 7 day cycle; up to two storeys per week when accelerated.
Commissioning, system testing	Around 2 to 3 weeks	Routinely reveals snags. The most squeezed activity on the job. Plus seasonal commissioning over 12 months.

SOURCES

Where this comes from

This guide is built on current UK evidence and named standards. The principal sources are listed below so you can place the method and check it for yourself.

Get It Right Initiative and CITB, Productivity Commission programme reporting, 2026 (25 projects, 942.5m pounds; inadequate planning the biggest cause of avoidable error). getitright.uk.com; constructionmanagement.co.uk.

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