construction productivity taskforce

PAPER 1

Designing for Productivity
The Case for Change

The construction sector remains a vital contributor to the UK's economy, accounting for 6.4%[1] of GDP and historically employing 6-7%[2] of the work force. Yet despite its scale and importance, the industry suffered a period of declining growth in 2025, 2.0%[3] reduction in construction output in the three months to Jan 2026.

However, 2026 begins with cautious optimism for the future. Many challenges in the sector continue to persist: high interest rates, escalating construction costs, global instability and acute labour shortages. Whilst some economic pressures sit outside of the industry's control, one critical lever remains firmly in its grasp – productivity. It is the lever that the sector has consistently failed to pull.

Previous initiatives to address construction productivity, such as the Lathan and Egan reports, have attempted to solve the construction productivity challenge by seeking to pivot towards the automotive industry model. Despite this productivity has flatlined for over 20 years, whilst other industries such as manufacturing have radically transformed and achieved sustained year-on-year improvement.

The construction industry is inherently unique through its fluctuating fusion of the bespoke and the repetitious, and the assumption that modern methods of construction alone could deliver a systemic uplift have proven overly simplistic. The radical shift required must not begin with technology, but with behavioural, communicative and mindset change.

That shift must start at the earliest stages of design. The greatest opportunities to meaningfully influence the improvements for construction productivity will already have passed once a Planning consent has been granted. The constraints fixed at Planning consent can inadvertently eliminate construction options that would otherwise support higher productivity.

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Unfortunately, construction productivity has often been viewed as the contractor's problem, with productivity metrics too often relegated to the construction phase, rather than shaped during early design. In fact, starting to address construction productivity only after the project has been tendered is, in many ways, too late. By the time a project is tendered, the design team may have unintentionally locked in inefficiencies long before a contractor ever sees the drawings,

Every key lever of construction productivity – value added per labour hour, pre-manufactured value, waste reduction, tool-time, corrective-time – can be shaped from the design period onward. So why is productivity so under-prioritised, under-valued and under-communicated at the moment when it matters most?

Continues >

1 ONS data, Dec '25
2 Construction Industry: Statistics and Policy. House of Commons Library, Dec '19. ONS Data Jan'26 & CITB Construction Workforce Outlook, Market Intelligence Report 2025-2029.
3 ONS Construction Output in GB, Jan '26

The Construction Productivity Taskforce, established in 2020 with the support of Be the Business, brings together leading clients, contractors, designers, consultants and suppliers with a shared mission: to accelerate the improvement of construction productivity in the UK.

Through publications that define measurement frameworks, share case-study data and set out a playbook for rules of engagement, the Taskforce aims to tackle the root causes of the industry's inertia and shine a light on how meaningful change can be achieved. Having initiated a range of construction-phase strategies, the focus now turns to understanding why, and how, the dialogue around productivity must begin during design.

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The industry has seen the impact of systemic behavioural change before. When construction and safety maintenance needed to be prioritised, the Health and Safety Executive introduced new workflows, responsibilities and cultural expectations, and the data clearly demonstrated the results.

The Building Safety Act is radically seeking a similar systemic change by requiring greater evidence of the design methodology that feeds into project documentation in relation to strategy, safety and buildability. This raises an important question: what role might a "Golden Thread" of construction productivity play in ensuring that productivity led thinking is embedded from concept through to delivery, overcoming the barriers that have kept improvement growth at bay?

No single bullet, and no single party, will solve the issue of construction productivity. Every member of the project team has a responsibility and a role to play to influence change. The upcoming series of papers bring together a wide range of industry voices to explore how productivity initiatives can be embedded and carried forward from the earliest design stages. Topics will include repairing the currently fractured design process, restructuring how project objectives are set, re-engaging the early dialogue with the construction and fabrication industry, re-establishing an educational feedback loop, and improving transparency and fluidity in the adoption of modern methods of construction.

Whether the solutions are near-term or long-term, the industry must activate every lever of change to shift the trajectory of construction productivity, and do so in a way that is systematic, collaborative and continually improving.

The Design for Productivity Workstream

The Design for Productivity workstream is a cross-industry collaboration of experts from design, construction, engineering, and academia, focused on how early design decisions can unlock productivity across the construction lifecycle through practical, scalable approaches.

The Construction Productivity Taskforce

The Construction Productivity Taskforce (CPT) is a cross-industry group working to improve productivity across the UK construction sector through actionable insights and collaboration.

Find out more

This paper was developed in close collaboration with:

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If the industry is to change, the dialogue must continue. Subscribe for early access to each paper in the Designing for Productivity series.

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