

Industry bulletin

The State of Construction Admin 2026

The Hidden Productivity Crisis

UK construction has an output problem that does not show up on site. It shows up in the paperwork, reporting and evidence trail behind every project. This briefing sets out the scale of the burden, what it costs, and why 2026 is the year it becomes a board-level issue.

Aldbry Intelligence Briefing

September 2026

AT A GLANCE

- UK construction productivity has grown by less than 0.5% a year since 1997, against 2.8% for the wider UK economy (ONS).
- Construction workers spend around 90 hours a year each on paperwork, at a cost of around £1,500 per employee (Re-flow / YouGov).
- The Construction Leadership Council estimates a 5% efficiency gain in the SME workforce, worth £2.2 billion, from digital tools that reduce the admin burden.

A productivity gap three decades in the making

According to the Office for National Statistics, UK construction productivity has grown by less than 0.5% a year since 1997. Over the same period the wider UK economy grew at 2.8% a year. Output per construction worker now sits approximately 13.5% behind the UK economy average, at around £35.69 per worker hour (ONS).

<0.5%

Annual productivity growth in UK construction since 1997, against 2.8% for the wider economy

Source: ONS

13.5%

How far output per construction worker trails the UK economy average

Source: ONS

The usual explanations are familiar. The industry is fragmented, work is project-based, sites are exposed to weather and capital investment has historically been low. All of these are real. None of them fully explain a gap that has persisted through three decades of new methods, materials and plant.

There is a less visible factor that rarely features in the productivity debate, because it never appears as a line item: the share of skilled time consumed by administration.

The scale of the admin burden

A national study by Re-flow with YouGov found that UK construction workers spend an average of around 90 hours a year per employee on paperwork: reading documents, completing forms and searching for mislaid documents. The direct cost is approximately £1,500 per employee, every year.

90 hrs

Spent on paperwork per employee, per year

Source: Re-flow / YouGov

£1,500

Cost of that paperwork per employee, per year

Source: Re-flow / YouGov

Two points about that figure deserve attention. First, it measures direct time only. It does not capture the knock-on effects that every director will recognise: decisions delayed because information cannot be found, rework caused by working from an out-of-date document, and disputes weakened by incomplete records.

Second, one of the three activities it describes is searching for mislaid documents. That time delivers nothing to the client, the regulator or the firm. It is pure loss, and it is repeated across every employee on every project.

The most expensive hours on the project

The burden is not evenly spread. Industry productivity research indicates that only around 35% of a site manager's time is spent on direct supervisory activities. The rest, close to two thirds of the working week, is consumed by administrative tasks, paperwork, calls and travel.

35%

Share of site managers' time spent on direct supervision. The rest goes on admin, paperwork, calls and travel.

Source: industry productivity research

This matters more than the headline average. The site manager is the control point for safety, quality, programme and cost. Every hour spent at a desk is an hour the site runs with less oversight. The true cost is not the salary attached to those hours. It is the risk and the margin sitting in the work that is not being supervised.

The exposure is greatest in growing mid-tier contractors, where the same people carry both delivery and documentation, and where there is rarely a dedicated team to absorb the administrative load.

The prize has already been sized

The Construction Leadership Council estimates that SME construction workforce efficiency could improve by 5%, worth £2.2 billion in savings, simply by using digital tools to reduce the admin burden.

£2.2bn

Potential savings from a 5% efficiency gain in the SME construction workforce, through digital tools that reduce admin

Source: Construction Leadership Council

What stands out is where that value sits. It does not depend on robotics, new materials or a wholesale shift to offsite manufacturing. It sits in the administrative layer that surrounds the work. The barrier is not the availability of technology. It is adoption: knowing where it applies, in what order, and how to embed it in regulated, safety-critical workflows without weakening assurance.

Why 2026 is a turning point

The admin burden is not new. What has changed is that three pressures are now arriving at the same time.

Evidence demands are rising.

As tier-one contractors demand more detailed evidence, more frequent reporting and tighter audit trails, the hours spent proving work was done correctly are rising while the hours doing the work stay flat (Construction News, 2026). For higher-risk buildings, the Building Safety Act 2022 and the golden thread add further weight to the record.

Labour is constrained.

CITB projects the UK will need more than 251,500 additional construction workers by 2029 to meet demand, against a backdrop of a major skills shortage. Firms cannot recruit their way around an admin problem when they struggle to fill delivery roles.

The technology has matured.

For the first time, tools exist that can read, draft, extract and check the unstructured documents construction runs on. Access is now close to universal. The difference will come from how well firms put it to work.

The consequence is that admin efficiency is moving from back-office housekeeping to competitive position. Firms that continue to carry the full burden will bid, report and deliver at a structural disadvantage to those that do not.

What this means for construction leaders

Admin is a productivity issue, not an overhead issue. It belongs on the board agenda alongside margin, safety and growth, because it directly shapes all three.

Most firms do not know the true size of their own burden. It is spread thinly across roles, hidden inside technical job titles and invisible in management accounts. What is not measured is rarely managed.

The response matters as much as the recognition. Generic software rollouts and ad hoc use of AI tools rarely move the number. The gains come from understanding precisely where the hours are lost inside a firm's own workflows, and addressing them in a way that strengthens, rather than dilutes, competent-person sign-off.

THE NEXT STEP

Find out what admin is really costing your firm.

Aldbry has built a proprietary system for removing the admin, documentation and compliance burden in UK construction and engineering firms, with AI applied at the right layer inside your workflows. It is shaped by people who have delivered major UK schemes.

The starting point is the AI Opportunity Audit: a fixed-fee assessment that maps where your firm's hours and margin are going, and where they can be recovered. It starts with a 30-minute call, where we talk through your firm and confirm the audit is the right first step.

[Book a call to get started](#)

[About the audit](#)

Visit aldbry.com or email info@aldbry.com

Sources: Office for National Statistics (ONS), construction productivity and output per hour; Re-flow / YouGov national study on construction paperwork; industry productivity research on site manager time; Construction Leadership Council (CLC); CITB, construction workforce outlook to 2029; Construction News (2026).