working for infrastructure

9 September 2026

CECA Budget 2026 Submission

Executive Summary

This representation sets out the Civil Engineering Contractors Association's (CECA) key recommendations for HM Treasury's forthcoming 2026 Budget. They are derived from a series of member engagement workshops that CECA undertook earlier in the year to develop the Association's core policy positions.

Unlocking infrastructure development and delivery across the UK will support economic growth, improve productivity, and deliver local benefits to communities. CECA recognises the current constraints on the UK's public finances. The priority for Budget 2026 should therefore be to protect productive capital investment and ensure that the Government's programme of policy reforms is converted into a stable, investable, and deliverable pipeline of infrastructure projects to drive economic growth, create jobs, and serve businesses and communities in all parts of the UK.

To achieve this CECA recommends that at Budget 2026 HM Treasury should prioritise the following:

- **Protecting stable, long-term infrastructure investment and translating the 10-Year Infrastructure Strategy into a funded and sequenced delivery programme**
- **Resourcing the effective delivery of planning reforms to speed up infrastructure delivery**
- **Continually improving the UK Infrastructure Pipeline to provide contractors with practical, reliable, and long-term market certainty**
- **Urgently addressing the funding challenges in relation to skills provision across the infrastructure sector while safeguarding continuity in any reforms to the Industry Training Board system**
- **Supporting the speedy passage and implementation of the Commercial Payments Bill, including the prohibition of construction retentions and support for fairer payment terms**
- **Using the redraft of the Construction Playbook to deliver improvements in relation to early contract involvement, the use of frameworks and to promote standard forms of contract.**

About CECA

CECA is the representative body for companies who work day-to-day to deliver, upgrade, and maintain the country's infrastructure.

With more than 300 members based across six English regions and the devolved nations of Scotland and Wales, CECA represents firms that together carry out an estimated 70-80 per cent of all civil engineering activity in the UK, in the key sectors of transport, energy, communications, waste and water.

CECA members deliver work worth an estimated £30 billion per annum to the UK economy and directly employ more than 250,000 people, with many more jobs represented across our members' extensive supply chains.

- ### Protecting stable, long-term infrastructure investment and translating the 10-Year Infrastructure Strategy into a funded and sequenced delivery programme

Budget ask: HM Treasury should protect multi-year capital investment and use its funding and oversight levers to ensure that major public infrastructure clients translate the 10-Year Infrastructure Strategy into funded, sequenced delivery programmes with clear and credible delivery profiles.

The 10-Year Infrastructure Strategy provides a welcome and long-term framework for building Britain's future prosperity. However, the value of the Government's £725 billion commitment will depend on the stability and credibility of the investment programmes that sit beneath it.

CECA members make investment decisions on people, plant, technology and supply-chain capacity against expected workload. Stop-start programmes, late changes to funding and uncertain procurement timetables undermine the business case for investment and increase delivery risk.

Budget 2026 should therefore prioritise the protection of productive capital spending and reinforce the principle of multi-year certainty across national and local infrastructure clients. Where programmes are already funded, Government should prioritise delivery over reannouncement, publish clear spending and procurement profiles, and give the supply chain adequate notice of any changes to expected work programmes.

- ### Resourcing the effective delivery of planning reforms to speed up infrastructure delivery

Budget ask: Following a period of significant consultation on the planning system, the Government should now focus on the effective and timely delivery of the new regime to get infrastructure projects and programmes through the consenting process and off the ground.

With the Planning and Infrastructure Act 2025 now in force and the revised National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) having recently been published, it is imperative that the benefits of reform are realised in practice. The Act reforms the consenting environment for major infrastructure, while the NPPF will reshape the wider planning environment in England. Both will depend on effective implementation.

For too long good infrastructure projects and programmes have been held back by an overly bureaucratic and convoluted planning system. With major reforms now legislated for and revised policy in place to overcome these challenges, the Government must commit the resources to making these reforms work.

This includes investing in skills and ensuring that the Planning Inspectorate and statutory consultees are equipped to deal with applications in a timely and efficient manner. A more effective and predictable planning system will provide CECA members with the certainty that they need to invest in business growth, in turn ensuring that the infrastructure that businesses and communities rely on is delivered at speed, while reducing the risk that public and private capital is tied up by avoidable delay.

- ### Continually improving the UK Infrastructure Pipeline to provide contractors with practical, reliable, and long-term market certainty

Budget ask: CECA recommends that HM Treasury ensure that NISTA is suitably resourced to maintain the Pipeline as a credible, twice-yearly market tool, and to improve the accuracy of information provided on procurement, delivery and workforce data at a project and work-package level of detail.

The UK Infrastructure Pipeline has evolved in a positive direction since its first publication in 2011. It has become an interactive resource that now provides the built environment sector with a range of useful data in relation to project profiles, investment opportunities and skills analysis.

To become a tool that the contracting community can use on a practical level, continual improvement must be made to the pipeline so that headline project visibility is translated into reliable procurement visibility. Future iterations should include more granular detail in relation to routes to market, procurement dates, deeper workforce analysis, and more in-depth sectoral and regional coverage. HM Treasury should support NISTA's continual engagement with industry to transform every aspect of the pipeline from a list of potential investments to an investable forward view of procurement opportunities.

To enable this to happen, the Government must continue to invest in the work of the National Infrastructure & Service Transformation Authority (NISTA) so that it is resourced to deliver the upgrades to the pipeline that industry needs. CECA will continue to engage constructively with NISTA to enable the insights of the Association's members to be fed into the ongoing development of the Pipeline. The objective must be a forward view that allows businesses to plan workforce, plant, and supply-chain investment with materially greater confidence.

- **Urgently addressing the funding challenges in relation to skills provision across the infrastructure sector while safeguarding continuity in any reforms to the Industry Training Board system**

Budget ask: CECA recommends that Government should ensure that the Growth and Skills Levy and related support make apprenticeship recruitment economically viable for infrastructure employers in all parts of the country, particularly SMEs, and should guarantee the continuity of employer support through any reform of the Industry Training Board system.

For the infrastructure sector to deliver it must be underpinned by a well-planned, well-funded, and employer-led skills system.

The Construction Skills Mission Board is rightly ambitious in its aim of delivering 100,000 new workers annually by the end of the current Parliament and CECA continues to support this.

However, in the shorter-term it is critical that the Government continues to invest to get the Growth and Skills Levy working for the infrastructure sector, so that it is more cost-effective and attractive for contractors looking to take on apprentices.

Recent Growth and Skills Levy reforms are welcome, including full apprenticeship-training funding for eligible under-25s in England from August 2026 and additional support for SMEs recruiting young apprentices. Government should monitor whether these measures are being translated into additional starts in infrastructure occupations. For many employers, particularly SMEs, the wider employment, supervision, and productivity costs associated with taking on an apprentice can still present significant barriers, even where training is funded.

Most urgently, clarity is needed on the future of the Industry Training Board system and the potential merger of the Construction Industry Training Board with the Engineering Construction Industry Training Board, which has been the subject of consultation.

Regardless of whether the two Boards are merged or not, Government must deliver an outcome that enables employers to recruit, train and retain. Employers need early certainty on the future structure, levy arrangements and future support, with sufficient time to plan any transition.

Any future regime must be industry-led, adequately funded, and provide access to support that is simple, accessible and relevant.

- **Supporting the speedy passage and implementation of the Commercial Payments Bill, including the prohibition of construction retentions and support for fairer payment terms**

Budget ask: HM Treasury should support the Bill's passage and ensure that implementation is adequately resourced, including the delivery of a clear timetable for prohibiting construction retentions and the effective enforcement of the new payment regime.

CECA welcomed the Government's response to the 2025 late payments consultation and subsequent introduction of the Commercial Payments Bill. Poor payment practices weaken cash flow throughout construction supply chains and disproportionately constrain smaller firms' ability to invest in people, plant, and technology.

Planned reforms, including maximum 60-day payment terms in qualifying commercial contracts and the prohibition of construction retentions, are both steps in the right direction towards creating a fairer business environment.

Government must now ensure that the Commercial Payments Bill that will carry the reforms through completes its passage through Parliament as quickly as is practically possible, whilst also working with industry to ensure arrangements are in place for the successful adoption of these new ways of working. The promised further consultation on the timing of retention prohibition should lead to a clear timetable of implementation, while the Small Business Commissioner and other relevant bodies must maintain sufficient capacity to monitor and enforce the future regime.

The outcome must be rapid reform that does not create avoidable uncertainty for businesses preparing to change established contractual practices.

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- **Using the redraft of the Construction Playbook to deliver improvements in relation to early contract involvement, the use of frameworks and to promote standard forms of contract**

Budget ask: Government should use the redraft of the Construction Playbook and its response to the Competition and Markets Authority's civil engineering market study to embed early contractor involvement (ECI), framework best practice, standard forms of contract and fair risk allocation, while ensuring social value requirements are applied proportionately.

The Government is undertaking a refresh the Construction Playbook, including consultation on updates to the current guidance. As part of this, effort must be targeted towards improving the ways in which the Playbook promotes early contractor involvement (ECI), the use of frameworks and the promotion of standard forms of contract.

The redraft of the Playbook provides an opportunity to strengthen how the Government procures and delivers public works. The priority should not simply be to improve the guidance, but to secure consistent implementation by public clients. This should align with the CMA's May 2026 final report on its civil engineering market study, which concluded that fragmented and short-term approaches to infrastructure procurement drive up costs, slow delivery, and hold back investment and innovation.

ECI improves the ability of different infrastructure clients to benefit from the experience of contractors in developing buildable and affordable solutions, allowing them to draw on delivery expertise while scope, design, risk and sequencing can still be influenced, improving constructability and affordability before price is locked in. Promoting the practice through the Playbook is imperative and in future it must strengthen the expectation that ECI is used wherever it can improve project outcomes.

In terms of frameworks, the Playbook should look to promote frameworks that provide certainty around work volumes and that commit to refrain from using mini-competitions where direct award is permissible, value for money can be demonstrated and substantive competition has already taken place at framework appointment. Reducing unnecessary repeat bidding will lower costs for clients and suppliers while making frameworks more investable for businesses that are appointed to them.

CECA also strongly supports the Playbook's existing preference for standardised contracts. The next revision should go further by establishing a clear presumption against unnecessary bespoke amendments that materially alter standard risk allocation, unless the client can explain why the departure is required and how it represents value for money.

The next iteration of the Playbook must enable contracting to become a more predictable process for all those concerned, which will support more effective delivery of projects and programmes that benefit businesses and the public.

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