CALON
INFRASTRUCTURE

A guide for infrastructure clients

The Pre-Tender Assurance Guide.

How tender packs leak value, what bidders look for, and what to check before your project goes to market.

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Who wrote it. CALON's practitioners spent their careers on the contractor side, pricing and winning infrastructure work. This guide sets out what we looked for then, so you can find it first.

Who this guide is for.

Programme directors, heads of capital delivery, procurement and commercial leads, and the boards they report to, in public bodies, utilities, housing associations and other organisations responsible for major capital investment.

It explains why the period before a tender is issued matters more than any other, what goes wrong in it, and how to check whether a project is ready before a contractor is appointed.

It is written as a reference, not a sales pitch. Where it describes CALON's own method, in sections 5 to 8, that is clearly marked. Sections 2 to 4 stand on their own.

Why projects fail before construction starts.

Infrastructure projects rarely fail because people cannot build them. They fail because of decisions made, or not made, long before anyone is on site. By the time a scheme reaches construction, most of what decides its outcome has already been fixed: the scope has been written, the contract drafted and amended, the design developed, the tender issued and priced.

In our experience, the projects that come under most pressure in delivery share a small number of root causes, almost none of which are found on site.

> *Scope was unclear before tender. Risk was misallocated or left unallocated. Design decisions created avoidable cost. Contract terms were never properly aligned with what the project actually needed.*

None of these are failures of construction. They are failures of preparation, and by the time they surface as claims, variations or disputes, the chance to prevent them has gone.

How bidders read a tender pack.

An experienced bid team does not read your documents to understand your project. It reads them to find where the price can move.

Scope that disagrees with itself

Specification, drawings and site information that say different things, or nothing where it matters. The bidder prices the cheaper reading and claims the difference later.

Contract terms that fight the Scope

Contract Data, secondary options and Z clauses that move risk somewhere the Scope does not expect. The bidder qualifies, or waits for the compensation event.

Pricing and evaluation that can be gamed

Pricing documents that miss scope, and scoring that rewards the wrong behaviour. The bidder loads rates, front-ends cash flow, or writes to the marking scheme.

Procurement administration

Conflicting deadlines, missing forms and unclear instructions. The bidder uses the ambiguity to delay, clarify or challenge.

An example.

Scope, clause 4.2
The *Contractor* obtains the connection offer from the distribution network operator and programmes the connection works.

Contract Data part one
The *Client* is the applicant for all utility connections and pays the connection charges.

> **Bidder's view:** two documents, two applicants. Price neither, then notify a compensation event when the offer arrives late.
> **Exposure:** connection cost and delay unpriced in every bid.
> **Fix before issue:** name one applicant and align Scope 4.2 with Contract Data.

Illustrative finding. Before issue, this is a drafting correction. After award, it is a compensation event with cost and time attached.

In autumn 2026 we reviewed 8 live UK public-sector tenders and logged 149 findings. The 90 categorised so far fall into these four categories. None required bad faith on anyone's side. Most were cheap to fix before issue.

Ten questions to answer before issue.

A client that can answer all ten with confidence is in a strong position to go to market.

1 **Is the scope complete, or does it rely on assumptions no one has written down?**

Unwritten assumptions are the most common source of clarifications, early variations and disputes.

2 **Do the specification, drawings and site information say the same thing?**

Where they disagree, a bidder will price the cheaper reading.

3 **Has every risk been allocated deliberately?**

Unintended risk transfer is rarely visible until it is tested, usually by the first significant change.

4 **Do the Contract Data, secondary options and Z clauses match the Scope?**

Internal contradictions are a common and avoidable source of dispute.

5 **Does the pricing document cover all the scope, and only the scope?**

Gaps become compensation events; overlaps invite double recovery.

6 **Would an experienced contractor build this design as drawn, in the sequence assumed?**

If not, the cost of the difference arrives as change.

7 **Is cost embedded in the design that does not serve its function?**

Design decisions made early are rarely revisited, and carry cost a later review would have removed.

8 **Could the evaluation model reward a bid you would not want?**

Scoring that can be gamed will be.

9 **Are deadlines, forms and instructions consistent across the tender pack?**

Administrative errors invite clarifications, delay and challenge.

10 **Has anyone outside the drafting team read the tender pack as one set?**

Familiarity with your own documents is the easiest place to miss something.

Four stages, four reviews.

One review for each stage before a contractor is appointed. Each stands alone, with its own scope and fixed fee.

1 Business Case and Funding Review

Does the case stand up before money is committed?

Cost, risk, programme and funding assumptions tested by people who have priced and delivered schemes like it.

- Cost plan and risk allowance against current market pricing
- Programme realism, including consents, outages and lead times
- Delivery model and packaging options
- Funding and grant conditions that constrain procurement or programme

From £3,500.

2 Procurement and Contract Strategy Review

Is this the right route to market, and the right contract?

Route, lotting, NEC4 or JCT option choice, risk allocation and evaluation model checked before you commit.

- Route to market and lotting strategy
- Contract form and main option (NEC4 ECC Options A to F, JCT)
- Risk allocation, secondary options and Z clause intent
- Quality and price evaluation model, including how it can be gamed

From £3,000.

3 Buildability and Deliverability Review

Can this design be built efficiently as drawn?

Design checked for sequencing, interfaces and cost a contractor would price in, before design freeze.

- Construction sequence, access and working space
- Interfaces between disciplines and with live assets
- Temporary works and outage or possession dependencies
- Design elements that are expensive to build for their function

From £4,000.

4 Tender Documentation Review

Is this tender pack ready for the market?

The full tender pack read as one set, the way a bidder will: scope, contract, pricing and evaluation.

- Scope gaps and contradictions between documents
- NEC: Contract Data, secondary options and Z clauses against the Scope
- JCT: contract particulars, schedules of amendments and the Contractor's Designed Portion
- Pricing document against the Scope and payment mechanism

From £4,500.

The CALON Assurance Framework.

One service, one lens, five maturity levels, one decision. The same structure on every engagement, so a rating means the same thing on every project.

Step 1

One service

You commission the review for the stage the project has reached.

Step 2

One lens

Each service is scored on its own lens only, keeping scope and fee fixed.

Step 3

Five levels

Absent, Emerging, Established, Managed, Robust.

Step 4

One decision

Proceed, proceed with conditions, or hold.

Lenses.

Service	Lens
Business Case and Funding Review	Case and funding
Procurement and Contract Strategy Review	Route and risk allocation
Buildability and Deliverability Review	Buildability and cost
Tender Documentation Review	Scope and contract

Levels and decisions.

Level	Meaning	Typical decision
Level 1, Absent	No meaningful provision.	Hold
Level 2, Emerging	Partly addressed, inconsistent.	Proceed with conditions
Level 3, Established	Defined and adequate. The pass mark.	Proceed
Level 4, Managed	Controlled and evidenced.	Proceed
Level 5, Robust	Resilient to how bidders will read it.	Proceed

Any Level 1 is reported as a hold, whatever the rest of the review shows. Anything below Level 3 comes with conditions to close before issue.

How an engagement runs.

Every engagement follows the same six steps. Scope, fee and delivery date are agreed in writing before any work begins.

1	**Get in touch**	Conflict check. Reply within a working day.
2	**Fixed fee, in writing**	Written scope, delivery date and fixed fee.
3	**NDA and documents**	Mutual NDA and a list of what we need.
4	**We review**	Read the tender pack as a bidder will. Every finding checked against its source.
5	**Report and decision**	Rating, ranked findings with owners and fixes, and a decision.
6	**Close-out**	Check the changes and confirm clearance in writing.

Fees. Every review has a fixed fee, scaled to project value and agreed in writing before work begins. If a report does not meet the agreed scope, we put it right at no cost. Current ranges are published at calon-infrastructure.co.uk/services. Engagements are structured to support straightforward client procurement routes, with clear scope and fixed pricing agreed before work begins.

CALON

About CALON

We have sat on the other side of the table.

CALON's chartered sector leaders bring decades of contractor-side delivery, framework leadership and NEC and JCT commercial management to the client's side, before a contractor is appointed.

We act only for clients. We never bid, prepare contractor submissions, act as designer or manage delivery, and we stop when a contractor is appointed.

Start with a free sample review. Tell us about an upcoming procurement and we will show you what a bidder would find in it, before you commit to a fee.

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