



Critical Interiors Series Sustaining the UK's Secure and Regulated Estates

A specialist perspective on ageing infrastructure, compliance and continuity in Defence and high-risk public sector environments.

Article Three

Why Healthy Supply Chains Protect Critical Infrastructure

with Jon Cornwell, Director (Defence) & Nick Bond, Managing Director at SPACE

Why Healthy Supply Chains Protect Critical Infrastructure

By Conflict Avoidance Pledge signatory SPACE INTERIOR SYSTEMS. March 2026.

In secure and regulated environments, delivery is typically focused on reliability and compliance more than speed. Reliability is established over time, through consistent operations, clear communication and professional respect across the supply chain. Where those foundations are weak, risk tends to surface elsewhere.

In Defence and other critical public-sector estates, supply chain behaviour directly influences compliance, programme certainty and operational continuity. In this context, stability is not simply about familiarity. It means being a contractor that clients can depend on: financially sound, operationally consistent, compliant and committed for the long haul, with the proven ability to deliver secure, high-stakes projects without disruption.

That kind of stability cannot be created overnight; it's built gradually through experience, reputation and goodwill across the supply chain.

Where Instability Shows Up

Instability in the supply chain rarely presents as immediate failure. More often, it appears in quieter ways, for example:

- A specialist unfamiliar with legacy constraints introduces a detail that conflicts with an existing fire strategy.
- Programme pressure discourages early challenge of an ambiguous specification.

- A new team underestimates the implications of restricted access, logistical requirements or procedural controls which can lead to frustrations and dis-engagement at the critical point of project delivery.

Technically, these issues may be easily correctable. Operationally, they can trigger extended approval cycles, documentation revalidation, access rescheduling and unnecessary disruption to live environments. In regulated estates, small misunderstandings can quickly snowball.

Jon Cornwell is Director (Defence) at SPACE, with over 20 years of experience working within the sector. He says:



“In Defence delivery, consequences travel further, and with amplitude. If teams aren’t fully aligned and either confident or experienced enough to challenge assumptions early, risk transfers into the estate. Supply chain stability reduces that exposure.”

Jon Cornwell, Director (Defence) at SPACE

Behavioural Risk in Regulated Environments

Much attention is given to technical risk in secure estates. Less attention is given to behavioural risk.

Where supply chain partners are not empowered through knowledge and experience or simply do not feel able to raise concerns early, minor uncertainties can harden into significant compliance challenges. In environments where rework is constrained and access tightly managed, the ability to question, clarify and escalate quickly and constructively is essential.

Healthy supply chain relationships create the conditions for that dialogue.

They allow:

- Early identification of ambiguity
- Clear, contextualised communications
- Transparent deconfliction between trades
- Proportionate responses to emerging issues



- Confidence in shared accountability
- Trust to be built with the client

This requires what might be described as 360-degree respect: between specialist contractors, principal consultants, manufacturers and client teams alike.

Over time, that professional respect builds goodwill across the supply chain. And goodwill, built through consistent collaboration over many projects, becomes one of the most valuable assets in delivering complex work safely and predictably.

Avoiding complacency in Established Supply Chains

Long-term working relationships bring stability, but they must also be managed carefully.

Familiarity can, if left unchecked, lead to complacency or opportunistic behaviour. In regulated environments this presents a different type of risk – where established partners begin to assume rather than verify, or commercial pressures influence decisions that should remain purely technical.

Mitigating this requires continuous investment in skills, knowledge and professional standards across the supply chain. It also requires maintaining a sensible number of capable specialist partners to ensure healthy competition and avoid single points of failure.

A stable supply chain therefore does not mean a closed one. It means a well-balanced ecosystem of trusted specialists who continue to invest in capability while being held to consistently high standards.

Commitment Beyond Contract

Across the sector, there is a growing recognition that healthier supply chain relationships are not simply a cultural aspiration, but a practical mechanism for reducing risk.

SPACE is a signatory of the Conflict Avoidance Pledge, an initiative developed by the Conflict Avoidance Coalition to encourage earlier dialogue, collaborative problem solving and more proportionate responses to emerging issues. The pledge reflects a wider shift within the construction and infrastructure sectors towards addressing potential disputes before they escalate into formal conflict.

Nick Bond, Managing Director of SPACE, founded SPACE 23 years ago. He says:



The Finishes and Interiors Sector (FIS) similarly champions collaborative working and fair contractual practice across specialist contractors and manufacturers. Through its engagement with FIS, SPACE aligns with the organisation's wider mission to strengthen safety, quality and productivity across the interiors sector. **In 2025, FIS became the first UK trade association to achieve Gold Status** with the Conflict Avoidance Coalition, recognising its leadership in promoting conflict avoidance and more stable, collaborative supply chain relationships.

Together, these initiatives reinforce a principle that is particularly relevant in regulated environments: where relationships are stable, communication improves, ambiguity is surfaced earlier and delivery becomes more predictable.

"These principles are particularly relevant in secure and regulated estates, where access is tightly controlled, documentation is scrutinised and interventions must be carefully sequenced." Jon explains "In these environments, stability within the supply chain strengthens communication, encourages early escalation of uncertainty and reduces the likelihood of risk migrating into live operational environments."

Every Specialist Trade Carries Strategic Risk

In regulated interior environments, no discipline is peripheral. Elements that might appear minor in other settings - fire-stopping details, service penetrations, partition interfaces or acoustic systems - often sit directly within the building's wider compliance framework.

Because of this, the work of each specialist trade has implications beyond its immediate scope. Installation sequencing, documentation and coordination must all be carefully aligned to ensure that the integrity of the overall system is maintained.



This reinforces the importance of a healthy supply chain where every specialist is respected as part of the wider delivery strategy, not treated as a secondary contributor.

For organisations responsible for secure estates, that alignment strengthens resilience over time. Consistent collaboration across the supply chain supports continuity, predictability and long-term trust in delivery partners.



Certificate number 17732
ISO 9001, ISO 14001, ISO 45001



Fire Door Installation
Fire Door Maintenance

