

The Defects and DLP Checklist

What to check before your defects liability period closes, and before you pay for an inspection.

Why this exists

A defects liability period has a hard close date, and once it shuts, any outstanding snagging becomes the client's cost rather than the contractor's. Housing associations and developers managing dozens of handovers a year lose track of individual DLP windows more often than anyone would like to admit, and the contractor rarely reminds them.

This is the list SML works through before booking a defects or condition survey, split into the questions that matter about timing and the questions that matter about the inspection itself. Use it on your own stock, or use it to check whoever you are about to pay to inspect it.

Six questions about timing, first

1. ■ Do you know the exact handover date for every phase, not just the scheme as a whole?

DLP windows run from individual phase handovers, not the overall project completion. A scheme handed over in three phases has three separate closing dates.

2. ■ Is the DLP twelve months from practical completion, or does the contract set a different period?

Most standard forms default to twelve months, but some contracts vary it. Check the actual contract, not the assumption.

3. ■ Who is tracking the closing date, and what happens if nobody does?

Once the window shuts, outstanding snagging becomes the client's cost. A missed date with no recovery is the single most expensive mistake in this whole process.

4. ■ Has anyone walked the property since handover, or is the DLP running on the original snagging list alone?

Defects show up over time, cracking, damp, settlement. A list frozen at handover misses everything that has appeared since.

5. ■ Is there photographic evidence tied to each defect, dated and plot specific?

A defect reported without a photograph and a date is easy for a contractor to dispute or delay past the window.

6. ■ If the DLP is closing in the next six weeks, has an inspection actually been booked?

Knowing a date is closing and having a survey booked before it closes are two different things. Only one of them protects the client.

Nine questions about the inspection itself

1. ■ Will the surveyor produce a written schedule of defects, or just a verbal summary?

A verbal summary cannot be handed to a contractor as evidence. A written schedule, plot by plot, can.

2. ■ Does the report separate genuine defects from fair wear and tear?

A report that flags everything as a defect loses credibility with the contractor and slows down the whole process. Distinguishing the two is the actual skill.

3. ■ Is the surveyor independent of the original contractor, or connected to them commercially?

An inspection paid for by the same relationship that built the property carries an obvious conflict, whether or not it affects the findings.

4. ■ Does the surveyor have hands-on construction experience, or only a desk-based inspection background?

Knowing what a defect looks like from years on site is different from ticking a standard checklist. The first spots things the second misses.

5. ■ Will the report include photographic evidence for every item listed?

Photographic evidence is what turns a dispute into a straightforward conversation with the contractor.

6. ■ Is there a clear distinction between urgent, health and safety related defects and cosmetic ones?

Not every defect carries the same urgency. A report that treats a loose stair rail the same as a scuffed skirting board is not doing its job.

7. ■ How quickly after the inspection will the written report be delivered?

A DLP closing in three weeks is not well served by a report that takes a month to write up.

8. ■ Does the surveyor also understand RAMS and CDM, in case remedial work itself needs documentation?

Fixing a defect is still construction work. A surveyor who only inspects and cannot speak to the compliance side of the remedy leaves a gap.

9. ■ Is the fee fixed per inspection, or does it change once defects are actually found?

A fee that rises once problems appear creates an incentive to under-report. Fixed pricing agreed up front avoids that entirely.

How SML answers these fifteen questions

SML carries out end of DLP inspections as a full walk of the affected plots, with a written, plot by plot schedule of outstanding defects and dated photographic evidence, ready to hand straight to the contractor before the window closes. Urgent and cosmetic items are separated clearly, and because SML also writes RAMS, CDM packages and construction phase plans, any remedial work identified can be documented without bringing in a second consultant.

Twenty three years in construction sits behind every inspection, ten as a carpenter and thirteen years managing sites, so a defect gets called correctly the first time.

Know your DLP dates?

Get an inspection booked before they close.

A full walk of the affected plots, a written schedule of outstanding defects, and photographic evidence.

Shane Leonce, Managing Director

07453 883869

shane@smlconstructionconsulting.co.uk

smlconstructionconsulting.co.uk