

How Wates Group Uses OpenSpace to Streamline Documentation, Manage Risk, and Give Leadership Time Back

UK-based Wates Construction uses technology to manage the sustainable construction of Wellington Place, a 1.5-million-square-foot mixed-use space in the heart of Leeds.

Goal: Speed up daily documentation while establishing a robust and easy-to-use catalog of historical imagery that creates accountability

As Section Manager for Wates Group, Lydia McGuinness has a lot to manage, particularly on a high-stakes project like the construction of two buildings at Wellington Place, a six-building, 43.6-acre commercial, residential, and retail space in the heart of Leeds City Centre. With more than 100 years of construction experience, UK-based Wates is raising the bar by prioritizing sustainable building techniques.

With massive, large-scale sites being built to innovative eco-friendly specifications, the need for documentation is paramount. In the past, McGuinness and other section managers relied on iPad photos and spent at least an hour at the end of each day trying to capture as much progress as possible. These photos were often spotty, which presented a challenge if an issue did arise. "You can take all the photos in the world, but you likely aren't going to have the right one you need," McGuinness said.


Wates Group needed a solution that would streamline and amplify documentation while creating accountability, mitigating risk, and saving the business money when addressing defects.

Strategy: Deploy OpenSpace for daily site walks, remote collaboration, and enhanced visibility

The two buildings at 11 and 12 Wellington Place will be the first NABERS-rated constructions in the UK outside of London. This prestigious designation is a seal of excellence for energy efficiency, water usage, waste management, and indoor environment quality for office buildings. As such, visibility is key throughout the construction process. "We have to document that the right materials are getting into the building and we're not putting in anything that isn't sustainable," McGuinness noted.

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Lydia McGuinness,
Section Manager, Wates Group



OpenSpace has been used on this project, along with a neighboring viaduct link, since construction began in January 2021. Section Managers simply strap on their hard hats with mounted 360-degree cameras and walk the site at the end of the day. “It’s so simple to use,” McGuinness said. “You just put on your hard hat, put in the area you’re walking, and press go. It uploads and your documentation is good for the day.” The result is a panorama of the site, similar to Google Street View, with each area’s visual history available with a tap. Section managers currently walk their sites once a day to complete end-of-day checklists, track progress, and capture site documentation that OpenSpace synthesizes into a comprehensive virtual twin, which can be toured virtually by remote teams.

Results: 15x faster documentation, cost savings, and increased accountability

“I think OpenSpace is really opening everyone’s eyes,” McGuinness said. From expediting issue resolution and increasing collaboration to enhancing documentation and saving time, she’s already seen tremendous benefits from OpenSpace. “I’m so passionate about OpenSpace because I’ve worked in this industry for about six years. There’s a lot of time constraints and project pressures—it can feel quite hectic. Anything that can save time, make things more efficient, and support Project Managers day to day is a huge win.”

OpenSpace has been so successful in its application at Wellington Place and the four other sites that it will soon be rolled out on four more projects.

So far, Wates Group is seeing benefits in the following areas:

- **Time savings:** Before OpenSpace, manual photo documentation was not only unreliable, it was also time consuming. McGuinness estimates that

15X FASTER PHOTO DOCUMENTATION

10X FASTER VERIFICATION BY QUANTITY SUPERVISORS

if everything went smoothly, she’d spent an hour documenting a site at the end of each day. Now, she spends about five minutes while documenting it much more comprehensively, which translates to 15x faster documentation. In addition to section managers saving time every day, remote leadership teams, such as Quantity Surveyors, are regularly taking virtual tours of the site and skipping the commute. With reduced travel and documentation time, everyone is getting hours back in their day to spend on high-level concerns.

- **Cost savings:** Wates often incurred significant costs when fixing defects on a project before it can wrap. “We had a Defect Manager who did an analysis, and defects were costing us 5–7% of the project’s total value,” McGuinness said. “That’s hundreds of thousands of pounds.” Providing conclusive evidence of who was responsible for a defect in the past was also difficult, but with the single source of truth now provided by OpenSpace, Wates is no longer unnecessarily footing the bill for repairs. “With OpenSpace, if I need proof of something, I can just navigate to that exact area and click a button until I get to the exact moment in time where the problem originated,” McGuinness said.



- **Billing accuracy:** Thanks to OpenSpace, Wates leadership can tour project sites without any travel, which has sped up verification as much as 10x. Quantity Surveyors can now smoothly track and verify progress and quickly approve subcontractor payments to maintain construction momentum.
- **Issue resolution and risk mitigation:** Defects aren't only costly; they also require a significant time investment to resolve. With robust, time-stamped documentation, OpenSpace can expedite dispute resolution. "When I'm using OpenSpace, I know I'm not missing anything, I know everything is getting recorded, and if I need evidence, it is always going to be there and I won't have to spend a lot of time searching for it," McGuinness said. "I think other sites need this technology. If they're not using it, they're wasting their time." After a recent break-in at the site, OpenSpace is also helping Wellington Place managers identify areas that can easily be compromised and verify end-of-day procedures that keep the site secure.
- **Improved collaboration and productivity:** Even as Wates team members get a significant amount of their time back, they're also collaborating more effectively. Surveyors don't have to travel to sites or enlist Project Managers to inspect areas, because they're able to digitally tour it at any time. This not only keeps all employees working within scope, but it also removes bottlenecks to enhance productivity.

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- **Accountability:** Not only does the consummate record of truth provided by OpenSpace offer increased accountability for subcontractors, it also verifies the best-in-class methods and materials used by Wates Group to secure NABERS and BREEAM Outstanding ratings. "We have a huge drive on this site to make sure everything is net-zero. With OpenSpace, we have the opportunity to document that we adhered to those principles," McGuinness said.