



Planned Maintenance vs Reactive Repairs

The True Cost of Waiting for Commercial Buildings to Fail

A practical guide for Facilities Managers, Estates Teams, Property Managers and Operations Directors looking to reduce unexpected costs, minimise downtime and protect commercial building assets.



The Most Expensive Repair Is Often the One You Did Not Plan For

Every commercial building requires maintenance. The question is whether that maintenance happens at a time, cost and schedule chosen by the organisation - or whether a building failure makes that decision instead.

For many businesses, maintenance can become reactive by default. An air conditioning unit stops working, an electrical fault develops, lighting fails, a door becomes unsafe or a water leak suddenly requires urgent attention. The facilities team responds, an emergency contractor is called and the immediate priority becomes restoring normal operations as quickly as possible.

Reactive maintenance will always have an important role. Unexpected failures can happen even in well-maintained buildings, making access to reliable 24/7 reactive support essential. However, when reactive repairs become the primary maintenance strategy rather than the exception, costs and operational risks can quickly increase.

Planned Preventative Maintenance (PPM) takes a different approach. Instead of waiting for assets and building systems to fail, maintenance is scheduled around inspections, servicing, testing and preventative interventions designed to identify potential problems before they become emergencies.

The difference is not simply maintenance cost. It can affect asset lifespan, employee productivity, statutory compliance, energy consumption, business continuity and the overall financial performance of a property.

This whitepaper examines the true differences between planned and reactive maintenance and explores how combining an effective PPM programme with dependable 24/7 reactive support can create safer, more reliable and more cost-effective commercial buildings.





Planned Maintenance vs Reactive Maintenance – Understanding the Difference

Reactive maintenance is straightforward: something breaks and action is taken to repair it. For certain low-risk building assets, this can sometimes be appropriate. However, applying the same approach to critical systems such as heating, ventilation, electrical infrastructure or fire safety equipment can expose organisations to significant operational risk.

Planned Preventative Maintenance reverses this process. Assets are identified, their maintenance requirements understood and inspections or servicing scheduled at appropriate intervals. This creates an organised maintenance programme rather than a succession of unexpected repair requests.

A PPM programme may include routine inspections and servicing of heating, ventilation and air conditioning systems, electrical installations, lighting, doors, plumbing, roofing and other building infrastructure. Statutory inspections and specialist servicing can also be incorporated into the wider maintenance calendar, creating greater visibility over upcoming responsibilities.

The objective is not to eliminate reactive maintenance completely. No facilities management programme can guarantee that equipment will never fail. Instead, PPM aims to reduce the frequency and severity of unexpected problems while ensuring that, when reactive support is required, there is an established process for responding quickly.

This creates a more balanced maintenance model: planned activity protects building performance day to day, while responsive reactive services provide the resilience needed when unforeseen problems occur.

For Facilities and Estates Managers, that distinction can transform maintenance from an unpredictable operational burden into a structured and manageable business function.



The Hidden Financial Cost of Reactive Repairs

The cost of a reactive repair is rarely limited to the contractor's invoice. When a critical building asset fails unexpectedly, the wider financial impact can be considerably greater.

Emergency call-outs can carry additional costs, particularly where work is required outside normal operating hours. Replacement components may need to be sourced urgently rather than through planned procurement, while temporary equipment or additional contractors may be required to keep the building operational.

Then there is downtime.

If an electrical failure makes part of an office unusable, employees may be unable to work normally. A heating failure during winter can affect an entire workplace, while problems with warehouse doors, lighting or other operational infrastructure can interrupt activity and potentially affect customers.

These indirect costs are often difficult to identify within maintenance budgets because they appear elsewhere in the organisation as lost productivity, overtime, temporary arrangements, cancelled activity or operational disruption.

PPM provides greater cost certainty. Maintenance can be budgeted, works scheduled at convenient times and replacement decisions made before an asset reaches the point of critical failure. Organisations can also group related works together, reducing unnecessary visits and improving contractor efficiency.

Rather than asking only, **“How much will this repair cost?”**, organisations should consider the broader question:

“What will this failure cost the business?”

That is where the financial case for preventative maintenance becomes significantly stronger.





Protecting Asset Lifespan, Performance and Compliance

Commercial buildings contain substantial investments in mechanical, electrical and physical assets. HVAC systems, electrical infrastructure, lighting, roofing, doors, plumbing and other equipment all have expected operating lives - but those lifespans depend heavily on how effectively the assets are maintained.

Equipment that is regularly inspected and serviced can often remain reliable for longer because developing problems are identified before they cause wider damage. Maintenance can also help equipment operate closer to its intended performance, avoiding situations where neglected systems continue running inefficiently until complete failure occurs.

This has important implications for capital planning. If an organisation understands the age, condition and maintenance history of its assets, replacement expenditure can be anticipated and incorporated into future budgets. Without that information, major capital costs can arrive unexpectedly.

Compliance creates another important consideration. Certain commercial building systems require regular inspection, testing or maintenance to satisfy statutory responsibilities and help protect building users. A purely reactive strategy is therefore unsuitable for areas where waiting for failure could create safety or compliance risks.

A structured PPM programme creates a clear maintenance history and provides greater visibility over inspections, servicing and remedial requirements. Facilities teams can see what has been completed, what requires attention and where future investment may be needed.

Over time, this creates a far better understanding of the building itself, helping organisations move from simply repairing assets towards actively managing their condition, performance and replacement lifecycle.



Business Continuity – Maintenance as Risk Management

Maintenance becomes particularly important when a building system is critical to business operations. The greater the operational dependency on an asset, the greater the potential impact when it fails.

For an office, loss of heating, cooling, power, water or access systems could make areas uncomfortable or unusable. Within warehouses and operational facilities, failures involving lighting, doors, electrical infrastructure or other essential systems can directly affect productivity and potentially interrupt wider operations.

Facilities management should therefore be considered part of business continuity planning.

Critical assets can be identified and prioritised according to their potential impact. Maintenance frequency, contingency arrangements and response requirements can then be determined based on operational risk rather than treating every asset in exactly the same way.

However, preventative maintenance does not remove the need for emergency support. Unexpected incidents will always occur. A complete maintenance strategy therefore combines proactive PPM with dependable reactive capability.

Access to 24/7 reactive maintenance provides organisations with an established route to assistance when something does go wrong. Instead of attempting to source contractors during an emergency, facilities teams can contact a trusted provider that understands their buildings, expectations and operational priorities.

This combination provides two levels of protection: planned maintenance reduces the likelihood of disruption, while responsive reactive support helps minimise its duration when unavoidable failures occur.



From Maintenance to Continuous Improvement

An effective maintenance strategy should do more than keep a commercial building operational. Over time, it should help make that building better.

Regular inspections provide valuable insight into recurring faults, ageing assets and areas where relatively small improvements could reduce future maintenance requirements. Rather than repeatedly repairing the same problem, facilities teams can identify opportunities for permanent improvement.

This is where PPM naturally connects with planned minor works.

A lighting system requiring frequent maintenance might present an opportunity for an LED upgrade. Regular flooring repairs could indicate that a more durable finish is required in high-traffic areas. Ageing washrooms could be progressively refurbished, while repeated problems with doors, partitions, electrical installations or workplace layouts may justify targeted improvements.

Minor works allow these changes to be delivered incrementally rather than waiting for another major refurbishment programme.

Decorating, flooring replacement, lighting improvements, additional power and data installations, office alterations, accessibility improvements and smaller mechanical or electrical upgrades can all form part of a continuous building improvement strategy.

Maintenance data can therefore become a valuable decision-making tool. Instead of viewing individual faults in isolation, organisations can identify patterns, prioritise investment and direct budgets towards areas capable of delivering the greatest operational benefit.

This transforms facilities management from a cost associated with fixing problems into a structured programme for protecting and improving the commercial property.





Moving from Reactive to Proactive Building Management

Every commercial building will require reactive repairs at some point. The objective of good facilities management is not to eliminate them completely, but to prevent avoidable failures and ensure an effective response when unexpected problems occur.

A proactive strategy starts with understanding the building and its assets. Critical equipment can be identified, maintenance requirements established and appropriate servicing schedules created. Statutory obligations can be incorporated into the programme, while maintenance records provide the information needed to identify recurring problems and plan future investment.

The result is greater control. Instead of maintenance budgets being dominated by unpredictable emergency expenditure, organisations can plan costs more effectively. Instead of equipment being replaced after catastrophic failure, asset condition can inform replacement decisions. Instead of disruption dictating when work takes place, planned maintenance can be scheduled around operational requirements.

Combining **Planned Preventative Maintenance, 24/7 reactive support and ongoing minor works** creates a complete approach to commercial building management. PPM helps prevent problems, reactive maintenance provides support when the unexpected occurs, and minor works address underlying issues while allowing buildings to continuously improve.

For Facilities Managers, Property Managers, Estates Teams and Operations Directors, the question is therefore not simply whether planned maintenance costs money. All buildings cost money to maintain.

The more important question is whether that investment is being made proactively and strategically - or only after something has already gone wrong.

Commercial buildings are critical business assets. Maintaining them proactively helps protect their condition, their occupants and the organisations that depend on them every day.