

DNA

PROJECT MANAGEMENT & CONTRACTING

DEVELOPER'S HANDBOOK

DELIVERING A PROJECT IN DUBAI

A practical guide for developers, investors and private clients building in Dubai, from the first feasibility study to handover. Free download from DNA Project Management.

WHY PROJECTS DRIFT

Most projects in Dubai that finish late or over budget do not fail on one big decision. They drift through many small ones: a payment certified ahead of progress, an authority submission that slipped, a change agreed on site and priced months later.

This handbook follows a project through six stages, from feasibility to handover. Each stage sets out what has to be decided, what usually goes wrong, and the controls that keep the owner in charge of the budget and the programme. A short checklist at the end covers what should be in place before capital is committed.

It is written for developers, investors and private clients, whether this is a first project in Dubai or one of many.



STAGE 1

01 FEASIBILITY AND SITE

The cheapest time to change a project is before it is bought. Feasibility is where the site, the product and the numbers are tested against each other.

WHAT HAS TO BE DECIDED

What the site allows: plot use, permitted area, height, setbacks and parking, as set out in the plot's affection plan and the master community's guidelines.

What the market will pay for: unit mix, sizes and specification, tested against current sales or rental evidence for that location.

What it will cost: a construction cost plan built from realistic rates, plus consultant fees, authority and service charges, finance costs and a contingency.

How long it will take: design, approvals, procurement, construction and handover, with realistic durations for each.

WHAT USUALLY GOES WRONG

The cost plan is built from a rate per square foot rather than the actual scheme. Authority and utility charges are left out. The programme assumes approvals will be quick. Contingency is cut to make the numbers work.

THE CONTROL

Test the scheme as a full development appraisal before the land is committed: revenue, every cost line, finance and timing. If the project only works with no contingency, it does not work.

STAGE 2

02 STRUCTURE, TEAM AND DESIGN

Once the numbers work, the project needs a structure and a team that can deliver it.

WHAT HAS TO BE DECIDED

The project vehicle and who signs contracts, approves payments and makes design decisions.

For projects that will be sold off-plan, the developer and project registrations and the project escrow account that Dubai's real estate regulator requires.

The consultant team: architect, structural and MEP engineers, cost consultant and any specialists, each appointed on a clear scope.

The design brief: what is being built, to what standard, and for what budget.

WHAT USUALLY GOES WRONG

Consultants are appointed on fee alone, with gaps between their scopes. The brief changes after design has started. Nobody owns the budget during design, so the scheme grows until the tender prices arrive.

THE CONTROL

Write the brief down and freeze it before concept design. Check the cost plan at the end of each design stage, not only at tender. Make one person on the owner's side accountable for decisions, so the consultants are not left to decide for the client.

STAGE 3

03 APPROVALS

In Dubai, approvals sit on the critical path. A building cannot start until the master developer, the building permit authority, civil defence and the utility providers have each signed off their part.

WHAT HAS TO BE DECIDED

The sequence of submissions and what each one depends on.

Realistic durations for each review, including time for comments and resubmissions.

Who is responsible for each submission and who chases it.

WHAT USUALLY GOES WRONG

Approvals are treated as paperwork for the consultants to handle in the background. The programme shows them as a single bar. A comment on one submission holds up the next, and the start on site slips by months.

THE CONTROL

Put every submission in the programme as its own activity, with its dependencies. Review progress weekly. Prepare for the common comments before the first submission, so the drawings go in right the first time.

STAGE 4

04 PROCUREMENT

Procurement decides what the owner is actually buying and on what terms. Most disputes on site trace back to something that was unclear at tender.

WHAT HAS TO BE DECIDED

How the work will be packaged and contracted: one main contractor, or separate packages.

Who is invited to tender, based on track record, capacity and financial standing.

The contract form, payment terms, retention, securities and the process for variations.

WHAT USUALLY GOES WRONG

The tender goes out on incomplete drawings, so the contract is full of provisional sums and allowances. The lowest price wins without a check of what it excludes. The contract is signed before scope gaps are closed.

THE CONTROL

Tender on the most complete design possible. Compare bids line by line, not on the total. Clarify every exclusion and qualification in writing before award. Keep provisional sums to a minimum and define the rest.

STAGE 5

05 CONSTRUCTION CONTROLS

On site, the owner's budget is protected or lost one month at a time. Four controls do most of the work.

FOUR CONTROLS

1. **Pay for what is on site.** Every payment application is measured against work physically in place, checked against the contract rates, and paid only once that work has passed inspection.

2. **Price every change before it is agreed.** No variation is instructed until its cost and its effect on time are on paper and approved by the owner.

3. **Hold the programme.** Progress is tracked against the baseline every week. Delays are raised when they start, while they can still be recovered.

4. **Sign off each stage.** Structure is inspected before it is covered by the facade, and services are tested before ceilings close.

REPORTING

A monthly report should let an owner see the real position in a few minutes: progress against programme, forecast completion, cost against budget including variations, payments certified, the main risks and the decisions needed. If it cannot answer those, it is a record, not a report.

STAGE 6

06 HANDOVER

Handover is where a project is remembered. Buyers, tenants and operators judge the whole development on the condition it is handed over in.

WHAT HAS TO BE DECIDED

The testing and commissioning plan for every system, and who witnesses it.

The snagging process: inspections, how defects are recorded, and the timeline to close them.

The completion certificate, utility connections and the documents the owner must receive: as-built drawings, warranties, operation and maintenance manuals.

WHAT USUALLY GOES WRONG

Snagging starts only when the contractor says the building is finished. Documents arrive months late. Defects are still open when buyers move in.

THE CONTROL

Start snagging floor by floor as areas are completed, not at the end. Make the handover documents a condition of practical completion. Hold the retention until defects are closed.

PREPARING A PROJECT FOR FUNDING

Fund managers and family offices that invest in development look for the same things: a clear project structure, a credible cost plan, a realistic programme and a team that has delivered before.

A project managed with the controls in this handbook is already most of the way through due diligence. The appraisal, cost plan, programme, approvals status and contracts are documented, current and consistent with each other.

As part of a PMC mandate, DNA can help structure a project, prepare it for due diligence and present it to the international fund managers and family offices we work with. Funding always depends on the investor's own review, and is never guaranteed.

CHECKLIST BEFORE YOU COMMIT CAPITAL

- ☐ The site's permitted use, area and height are confirmed from the affection plan and community guidelines.
- ☐ A full development appraisal shows the project works with a contingency in place.
- ☐ The project structure, signatories and decision-maker on the owner's side are agreed.
- ☐ The design brief is written down and agreed.
- ☐ Consultants are appointed on clear, complete scopes.
- ☐ Every approval is in the programme with realistic durations.
- ☐ The tender strategy and contract form are chosen.
- ☐ Payment, variation and inspection procedures are agreed before work starts.
- ☐ Monthly reporting is defined: what it shows and who receives it.
- ☐ Handover requirements and documents are written into the contract.

ABOUT DNA PROJECT MANAGEMENT

DNA Project Management is a Dubai-based PMC and owner's representative for developers, corporate and private clients. We act as the client's delivery team from feasibility to handover, across residential, commercial, mixed-use and logistics developments, with over AED 390 million in projects delivered and a further AED 67 million under current management.

TO TALK THROUGH A PROJECT

dnaprojectmanagement.com
+971 4 385 3804