

## Scoop of the year

Zak Garner-Purkis, Construction News

### Inside Spurs' stadium: 'I've never in my life worked like that'

Zak broke the most popular and most influential story in CN's history, smashing previous records by a gigantic margin. The exclusive story revealed allegations that site chaos, confusion, drugs and alcohol lay behind the delays to Tottenham Hotspur's £850m stadium.

Zak employed his social media expertise to track down construction workers involved in the project, trawling through countless user profiles to find those engaged on the project. This time-consuming stage proved key to the story, as Zak sourced multiple people actually working on the stadium and persuaded some to speak on the record, one of them a senior manager.

Several specifically said they agreed to talk only because of the accuracy of Zak's previous coverage of the stadium story.

### Pick-up:

Zak's scoop was picked up and covered by every national newspaper, with page leads in the print editions of *The Times* and *The Daily Telegraph*. It ran as the top story of the *Mail's* online sport page, with a substantial story in the print edition. *The Mirror's* chief football writer, John Cross, tweeted out the story out saying: "Construction News strikes again". BBC Sport's Richard Conway also sent out a series of tweets quoting Zak's articles and linking to the feature, as did ESPN writer Matt Scott. The scoop was also covered by Sky and TalkSport as well as the Guardian Football Weekly and Off The Ball podcasts.

### In numbers:

Zak's feature was viewed 110,000 times in a week. For context, CN's second most popular story to date took 14 months to garner 25,000 views. The average time spent on the page was almost six minutes, meaning readers have collectively devoted 11,000 hours (around 450 days) reading this single feature. In the week of the article's publication, CN gained more than 350 new registered users – double the typical number.

*The Telegraph* (Left) and *Times* (Right)



## **Nationals links**

*The Times:* <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/spurs-builders-took-cocaine-at-new-white-hart-lane-dnmckpttx>

*The Telegraph:* <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/football/2018/09/20/spurs-stadium-workers-heads-cocaine-alcohol-construction/>

*Daily Mail:* <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/sport/football/article-6189891/Damning-report-claims-drug-alcohol-use-staff-Tottenhams-delayed-850m-stadium.html>

*The Mirror:* <https://www.mirror.co.uk/sport/football/news/tottenham-stadium-workers-have-taken-13279815>

*The Independent:* <https://www.independent.co.uk/sport/football/premier-league/tottenham-stadium-construction-news-site-drink-drugs-delayed-construction-a8548406.html>

*The Sun:* <https://www.thesun.co.uk/sport/football/7308542/tottenham-new-stadium-booze-cocaine-white-hart-lane/>

*Daily Star:* <https://www.dailystar.co.uk/news/latest-news/731201/tottenham-hotspur-new-stadium-news-workers-building-cocaine-alcohol-claim>

*Esquire:* <https://www.esquire.com/uk/latest-news/a23352369/workers-at-new-spurs-stadium-allegedly-turned-up-drunk-and-took-cocaine-in-toilets/>

## **Online/international links**

*Joe:* <https://www.joe.co.uk/sport/shocking-claims-spurs-stadium-200543>

*Fox:* <https://www.foxsports.com.au/football/premier-league/explosive-report-claims-workers-on-spurs-new-stadium-drunk-and-on-cocaine/news-story/7aab0192fc616c7fcd2c4aba753c7383>

*NZ Herald:* [https://www.nzherald.co.nz/sport/news/article.cfm?c\\_id=4&objectid=12129077](https://www.nzherald.co.nz/sport/news/article.cfm?c_id=4&objectid=12129077)

*RTE:* <https://www.rte.ie/sport/soccer/2018/0921/995183-spurs-stadium-workers-hit-with-drink-and-drugs-claims/>

# Inside the Spurs stadium

CN exclusively reveals allegations that site chaos, confusion and ill-discipline lie behind the delays to Tottenham Hotspur's £850m stadium



**PROJECTS**  
ZAK GARNER-PURKIS

"Stop what you're doing!" cries a supervisor, halting the work of a gang of electricians on Tottenham Hotspur's new £850m stadium.

The sudden stop is due to the appearance of workers from an air-conditioning subcontractor, who are carrying a large piece of metallic piping. These AC workers have turned up to finish their installation. The problem is, the electricians were told the AC work had already been completed.

As a result, all the work the electricians had done has to be torn out. This is made all the more frustrating by the fact that completed electrics, carried out on the exact same spot, had already been ripped out two weeks earlier for the same reason.

Electricians had worked all weekend to complete work on this first occasion, only to discover on the Monday that the air-conditioning had not been installed. A fortnight later they think the AC has finally been finished; again they have their work ripped out.

This is just one alleged instance of poor co-ordination and

communication that sources working on the project have shared with *Construction News* to help explain the stadium's delay, announced last month.

Sources claim that an unclear management structure at times, chaotic organisation and poor communication led to mistakes - often by electrical subcontractors. They describe a huge site where small problems escalated rapidly.

And compounding these programme setbacks were personnel issues, with reports of physical altercations and drug-taking on site.

## Mace a 'toothless lion'

Early into the project, Spurs took the decision to cut deals individually with subcontractors and appoint Mace as construction manager to oversee the job.

By choosing to have a direct commercial relationship with individual companies rather than appointing an overall contractor, the club limited Mace's liabilities on the scheme.

However, insiders have told CN that this approach also limited Mace's influence.

Multiple sources claim this arrangement led to subcontractors focusing only

on completing their own tasks, without considering the wider implications for other trades or progress of the overall project.

The lack of co-ordination or logistical planning frequently led to confusion on site and costly mistakes that delayed work significantly, the insiders claim.

Sources claim that Mace's visibility on the site prior to the delay being announced was also limited. However, CN understands that Mace has maintained its staff numbers at similar levels throughout the project, but that due to the decreased number of operatives on site, visibility of its personnel has increased on site since the delay was revealed.

The construction manager's ability to control the actions of subcontractors is limited because it is only able to "advise" rather than instruct the trades on site. The lack of a commercial relationship changed the power dynamic between the construction manager and those on site, CN's sources allege.

"They are like a toothless lion, they have no claws and no teeth," a source with in-depth knowledge of the management structure tells CN. "This situation is quite strange. [Mace] can only say, 'This area is ready, could you please

deploy someone and sort it out?'"

Further confusion has been caused by the presence of Tottenham Hotspur's own project managers. "I don't really know who the construction managers really are - Mace? Tottenham?" the same insider says.

## 'No communication'

Poor communication is a common claim in almost every problem described by CN's onsite sources. The lack of dialogue between trades on the scheme is said to have resulted in confusion between trades, compounded by the scale of the project and the number of subcontractors.

"What should take a week

normally takes a month, because of the sheer scale of it, but also because the communication is horrendous," a source on the site tells CN.

As well as the electrical wiring being ripped out on two occasions because of poor communication, CN has heard other alleged instances where the work of one subcontractor hindered that of another.

A further example was when a team of electricians is said to have tried to connect two sections of wiring, only to find that access had been blocked by the installation of a ceiling.

Another alleged case saw an electrical subcontractor

team arrive to work on executive boxes, understood by other subcontractors to have been completed.

"There was no communication," a source tells CN. "Everyone was rushing to finish their jobs; it didn't matter whether the other ones did or not."

## Sparks fly

The electrical work on the project has received more scrutiny than any other part of the build.

Mace chief executive Mark Reynolds has said "faulty wiring" was the cause of the delay, and there has been repeated tabloid media coverage of the rates being paid to electricians on the site.



A number of sources on the project claim that electricians have been working in chaotic conditions, which only began to improve in the wake of the project's official delay.

CN has heard how staff

**"This situation is strange. [Mace] can only say, 'This area is ready, could you please deploy someone and sort it out?'"**

SITE SOURCE CLAIM

employed on the stadium felt unable to work effectively because they were not provided with the right tools for the job.

They claim they were unable to power their tools properly because the transformer provided only lasted for four hours, but they were working for 12. When they tried to charge the unit, they realised they had not been given the cables to do so.

The inability to get the materials on time and to order was another problem for gangs of electricians on the project. "Things would go wrong because people didn't have materials," one electrical source alleges.

The insider reports that vital ▶

## “I’ve not worked on a site like that in a long time. People drinking cans in the morning before going on to site and snorting coke in the toilets”

SITE SOURCE CLAIM

► materials ordered days in advance would not be delivered to the store, meaning advance planning was often scuppered and teams had to work ad-hoc based on whatever supplies were available.

“They should have known exactly what they needed for next week and had it there ready for then, but somehow it wasn’t done,” they claim. “We’d have to reorganise everything based on the information we were given that morning from the store. I’ve never in my life worked like that.”

Work was also delayed by the night-shift team taking equipment and supplies and leaving it in other parts of the site, insiders report. This meant that some days began with electrical subcontractors roaming the site looking for the equipment they had been using the day before.

### Drugs and alcohol

The number of workers on site grew to nearly 4,000 as the project neared its original deadline, which reportedly led to problems with some workers.

CN has heard first-hand accounts describing a minority of workers being under the influence of alcohol and, in some cases, cocaine while working on the project, with sources even claiming that the drug was being used in site toilets.

A number of physical altercations also allegedly broke out when site numbers were at their peak.

“I’ve not worked on a site like that in a long, long time,” one source says, claiming: “There were people off their heads, drinking

cans [off site] first thing in the morning before going on to site and snorting coke in the toilets.”

There is no suggestion that Mace was informed of the instances of drinking and drugs, or that it failed to take action. The contractor operates a strict drugs and alcohol policy that includes regular random testing of its own staff as well as across its entire supply chain.

A spokesman for Mace said: “The health, safety and wellbeing of everybody is, and has always been, a core value at Mace and any suggestion that our rigorous standards around best practice or drugs and alcohol had been broken would be taken extremely seriously.”

“We carry out regular random drugs and alcohol testing to ensure that our rules are enforced throughout our supply chain.”

Any concerns about specific health and safety risks should be flagged to the management team on site.”

### The home straight

Improvements have been made to working practices since the announcement of the stadium’s delay, according to CN’s sources.

A reduced headcount, greater visibility of Spurs and Mace managers and closer attention to detail have been praised by project insiders.

“There was a lot of corner-cutting [before the delay], but it’s definitely gone the opposite way now,” a source claims. “It will take a bit more time but I think Tottenham realise that, and they will get a better product at the end of it instead of something that’s just rushed.”

Despite these improvements, sources on the scheme claim the stadium will not be ready until the first week of January.

They go as far as to suggest the club could potentially “write off the season”, playing remaining 2018/19 fixtures at other venues in anticipation of a summer completion date.

A Tottenham Hotspur spokesman said: “We have always said that we would issue updates for test events and official

## SUBCONTRACTORS COMMENT

### Imtech: Subcontractor statement

Imtech is the stadium project’s largest electrical subcontractor, and its chief executive Paul Kavanagh responded to the allegations:

“This is the fifth major stadium that Imtech has played a significant role in building, and we were selected on our proven ability to deliver these complex and difficult projects.

“All stadium projects are complicated and the Tottenham Hotspur project is, by any standards, a very large and complex one. The tight timescales and deadlines for completion of the works has added additional pressure to that which would normally come with a project of this scale.

“It is undoubtedly the case, given this scale and complexity, that some operational inefficiencies may have occurred in the course of the project. Imtech is not responsible for the delivery of all of the electrical scope, and we really do not recognise the

comments that [*Construction News*] suggests are attributed to our work or processes. Our team have worked incredibly hard to deliver a world-class stadium.”

“We reject allegations of poor workmanship or lack of attention to the health and safety of our employees. Throughout this project, the health and safety of our employees, contractors and supply chain and the minimising of risks has been our principal concern, as our performance against our rigorous health and safety measures indicates.

“We are proud of our standards and the efforts and hard work that our employees, contractors and supply chain have delivered to get us to this point. We will continue to work with the club and Mace to deliver another world-class stadium. Our people who have worked on this project will be proud to have done so.”

opening as soon as we have confidence in our project managers’ and contractors’ ability to deliver against the revised schedule of works.

“This remains the case and speculating on unsupported dates such as this is irresponsible.”

Responding to CN’s investigation, a Mace spokesperson said: “The club and the construction team are working diligently to complete this iconic stadium as soon as possible.

“Although these delays are obviously frustrating, once

complete the new stadium is going to leave a fantastic, lasting legacy and will be a project everyone involved will be proud to be associated with.”

Sources also warn that, with the pace of work having slowed, there is a risk of complacency. “Maybe it could be a dangerous game of subcontractors thinking the job is finished and taking their foot off the gas,” one insider cautions.

Regardless of the pace of work, the corners allegedly cut earlier in the programme may result in a lengthy handover process.

“There will be guys in there [sorting out] snagging for months on end,” one source predicts.

“Once it’s been handed back over to Tottenham, there will be another rigmarole getting contractors back in there doing works and jumping through Tottenham’s hoops.”

## “We carry out regular random drugs and alcohol testing to ensure that our rules are enforced throughout our supply chain”

MACE SPOKESMAN

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