



# Monthly Statistics of Building Materials and Components

## Commentary

May 2018

Coverage: UK and Great Britain  
Geographical area: Country, region  
and county  
Date of publication: 6<sup>th</sup> June 2018

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## Headline results

- Sales of sand and gravel have decreased by 15.7% when comparing Q1 2018 to Q1 2017. This could be in part due to the unseasonably cold weather conditions experienced in February and March 2018.

## Important Notice

This publication is now published by the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS). All references to the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) made in this publication refer to when it was published by BIS. This has made no impact to the content of the publication.

The methodology for the sand and gravel estimates has changed. Please see the background notes for further details.

## Introduction

This commentary accompanies the latest Monthly Statistics of Building Materials and Components bulletin, published on the BEIS building materials [web page](#) on 6<sup>th</sup> June 2018. It aims to provide a brief overview of recent trends in the data presented in the bulletin.

The bulletin presents the latest detailed information on selected building materials and components. It covers the following building materials statistics (in parentheses, the data collection frequency and the geographical area covered):

- Construction material price indices (monthly, UK)
- Sand and gravel sales (quarterly, GB\*)
- Slate production, deliveries and stocks (quarterly, GB)
- Cement and clinker production, deliveries and stocks (annual, GB)
- Bricks production, deliveries and stocks (monthly, GB\*)
- Concrete building blocks production, deliveries and stocks (monthly, GB\*)
- Concrete roofing tiles production, deliveries and stocks (quarterly, GB)
- Ready-mixed concrete deliveries (quarterly, UK)
- Values of overseas imports and exports trades for selected materials and components for use in construction (quarterly, UK)
- Value of EU and Non-EU Trade for selected materials and components for use in construction (annual, UK)

Note: \* Regional figures available

These statistics support analysis of the construction materials market and business planning. They are regularly reported in the construction press and are used for a variety of purposes, including policy development and evaluation concerning the construction products industry, as well as monitoring market trends. Further detail is available in this document under [Uses of the data](#).

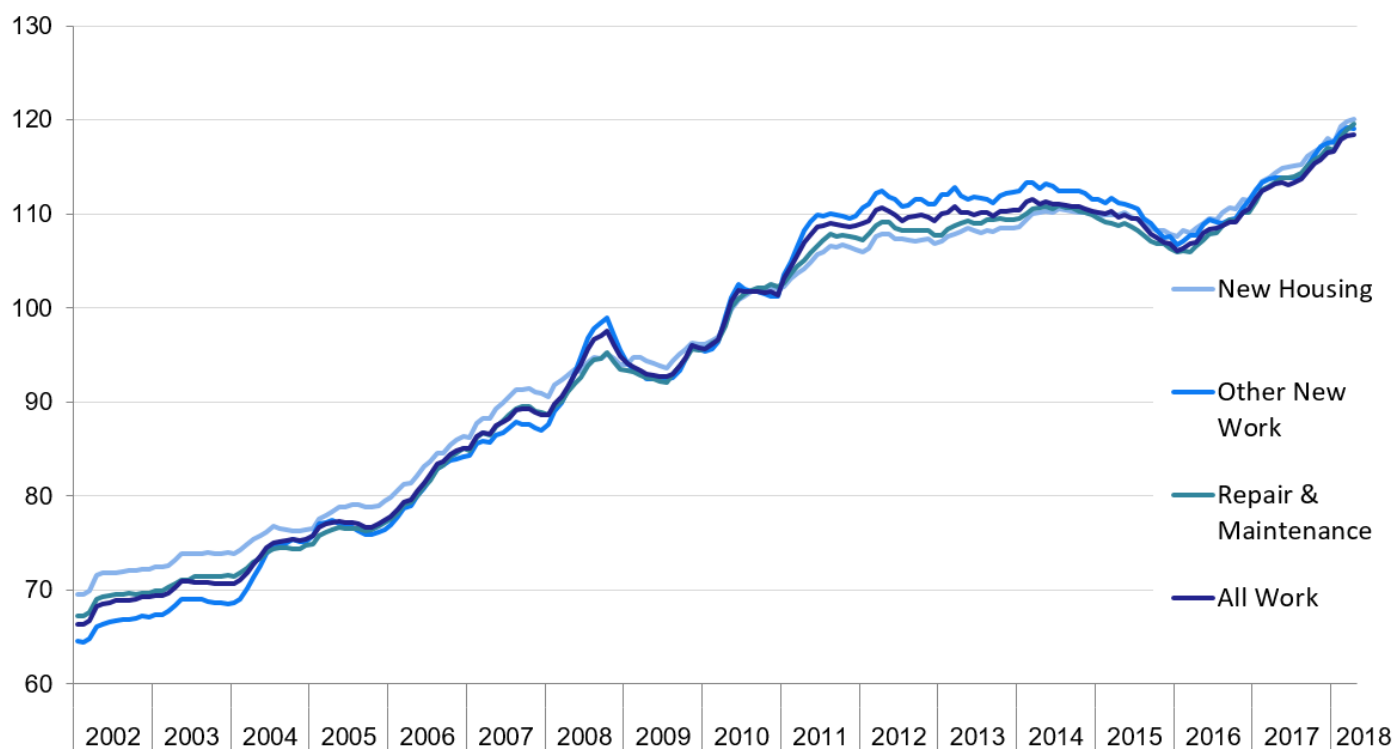
## Seasonal Adjustment Review

Seasonally adjusted series for deliveries of bricks, concrete blocks, ready-mixed concrete and sales of sand & gravel are published in this bulletin. The purpose of correcting the reported series is to allow for seasonal factors such as winter weather (including the reduction in hours of daylight, and frost and rain) and other seasonal events such as Christmas and Easter. Thus seasonally adjusted figures show the underlying trend more clearly. Further information can be found in paragraph 2 of the Background Notes ([see page 11](#)).

## Summary of results

### Material Price Indices

**Chart 1: Construction Material Price Indices, UK**  
Index, 2010 = 100



Source: Table 1, Monthly Statistics of Building Materials and Components

#### Year-on-year change

Change from April 2017 to April 2018	
<b>New Housing</b>	5.0%
<b>Other New Work</b>	4.6%
<b>Repair &amp; Maintenance</b>	5.5%
<b>All Work</b>	4.6%

#### Month-on-month change

Change from March 2018 to April 2018	
<b>New Housing</b>	0.3%
<b>Other New Work</b>	-0.1%
<b>Repair &amp; Maintenance</b>	0.5%
<b>All Work</b>	0.1%

Looking at the longer term change, the material price index of **'All Work'** increased by **4.6%** in April 2018 compared to the same month in the previous year.

**Table 1: Construction materials experiencing the greatest price increases and decreases in the 12 months to April 2018, UK**

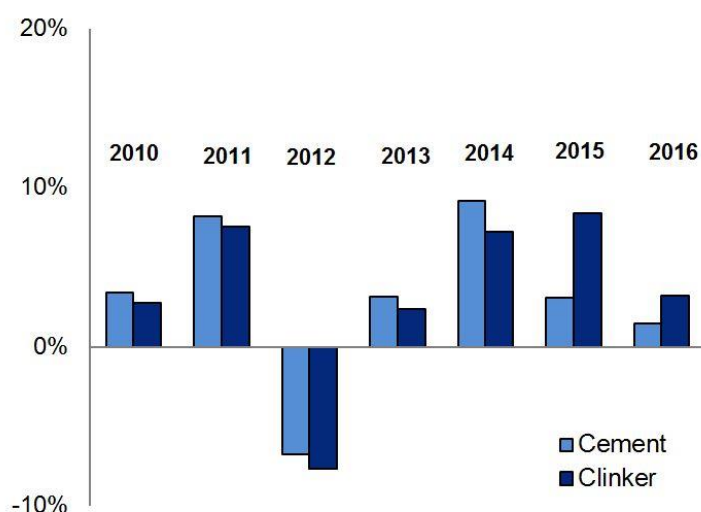
Construction Materials	% change on a year earlier
<b>Greatest price increases</b>	
Concrete reinforcing bars	12.0
Imported plywood	11.0
Imported sawn or planed wood	8.4
<b>Greatest price decreases</b>	
Lighting equipment for roads	-1.8
Other builders ironmongery	-1.2
Sand & gravel (excluding levy)	-0.8

The aggregated construction material price index hides larger price movements for some specific products and materials. The three largest increases and decreases are presented here.

Source: Table 2, Monthly Statistics of Building Materials and Components

## Cement & Clinker

**Chart 2: Production of Cement and Clinker, GB**  
Percentage change over previous year (%)



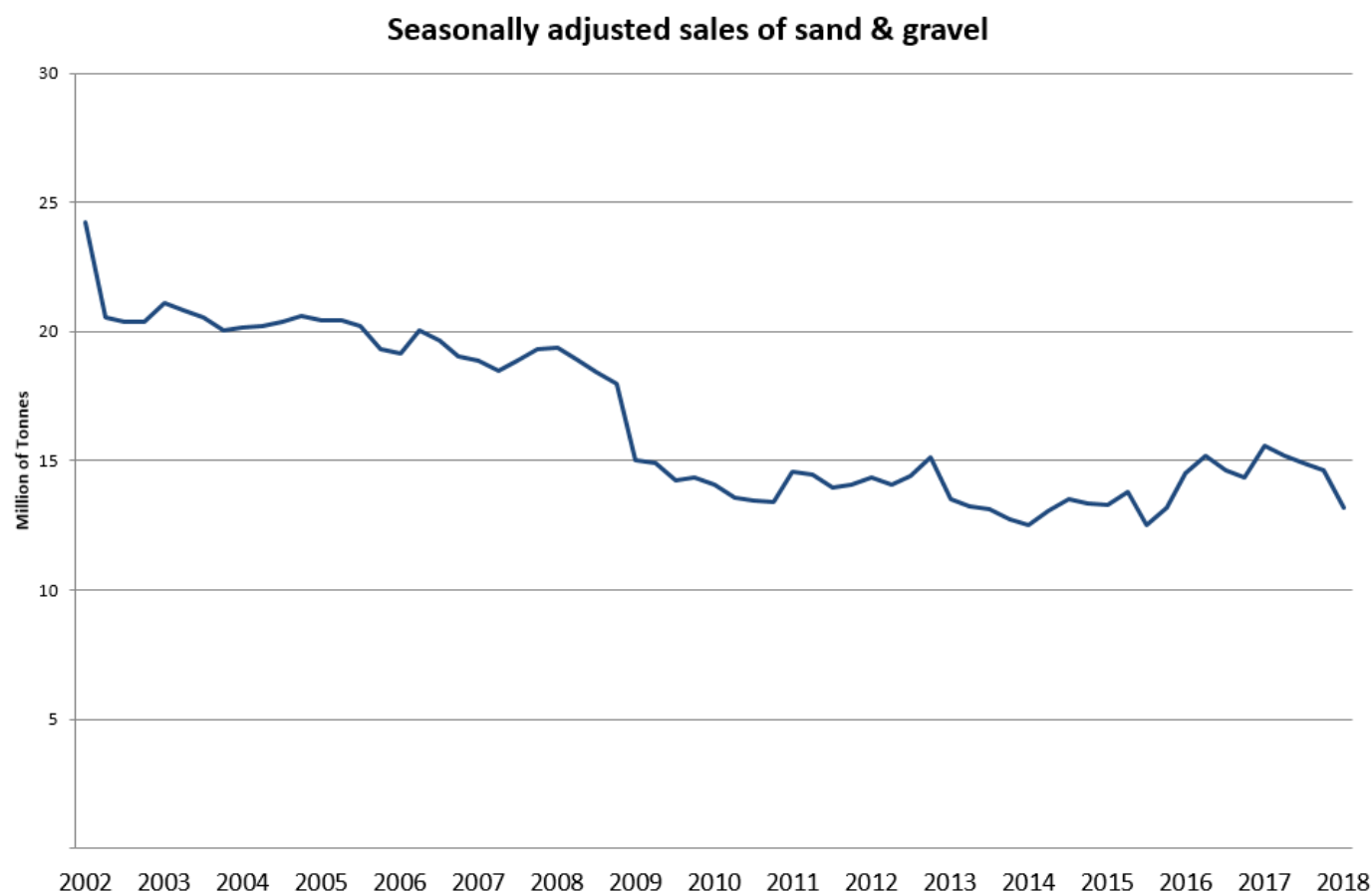
Cement production rose by 1.5% to 9.4 million tonnes in 2016, compared to the previous year. This growth in cement production follows growth of 3.1% to 9.2 million tonnes in 2015. Pre-recession production peaked in 2007 at 11.9 million tonnes.

Production of Clinker rose by 3.2% to 8.1 million tonnes in 2016, compared to the previous year. This growth in clinker production follows growth of 8.4% to 7.8 million tonnes in 2015. Pre-recession production, in 2007, stood at 10.2 million tonnes.

Source: Table 8, Monthly Statistics of Building Materials and Components

## Sand & Gravel

**Chart 3: Seasonally Adjusted Sales of Sand & Gravel, GB**  
Weight of sand & gravel



Source: Table 4, Monthly Statistics of Building Materials and Components

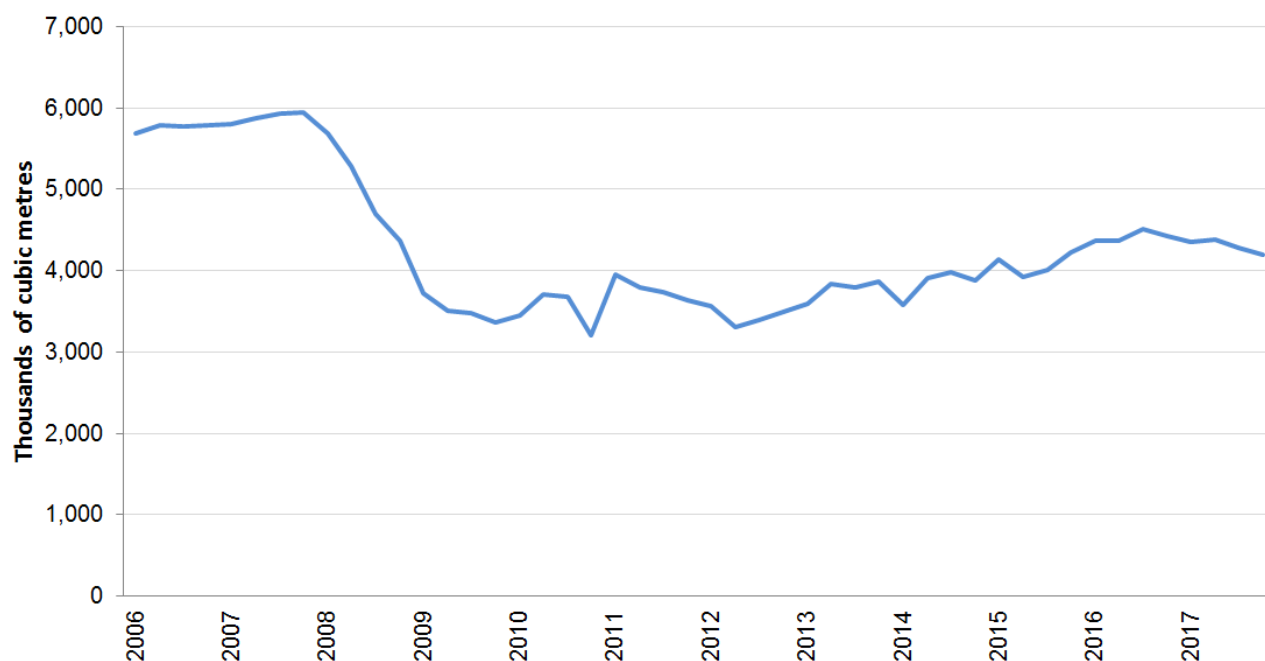
The methodology for the sand and gravel estimates has changed. Please see the background notes for further details.

- Sales of sand & gravel **decreased 10.1%** in Quarter 1 2018 compared to Quarter 4 2017, according to the seasonally adjusted data.
- This followed a decrease of 1.8% in Quarter 3 2017.
- Comparing Quarter 1 2018 to the same quarter in the previous year, sales have **decreased** by 15.7%.

Seasonally adjusted sales of sand & gravel have consistently remained below levels typically seen before the recession.

## Concrete

**Chart 4: Seasonally Adjusted Sales of Ready-Mixed Concrete, GB**  
Volume of concrete



Source: Table 13, Monthly Statistics of Building Materials and Components.

The data source for raw RMC has changed from 2016 Q1; these figures form the basis of the seasonally adjusted data.

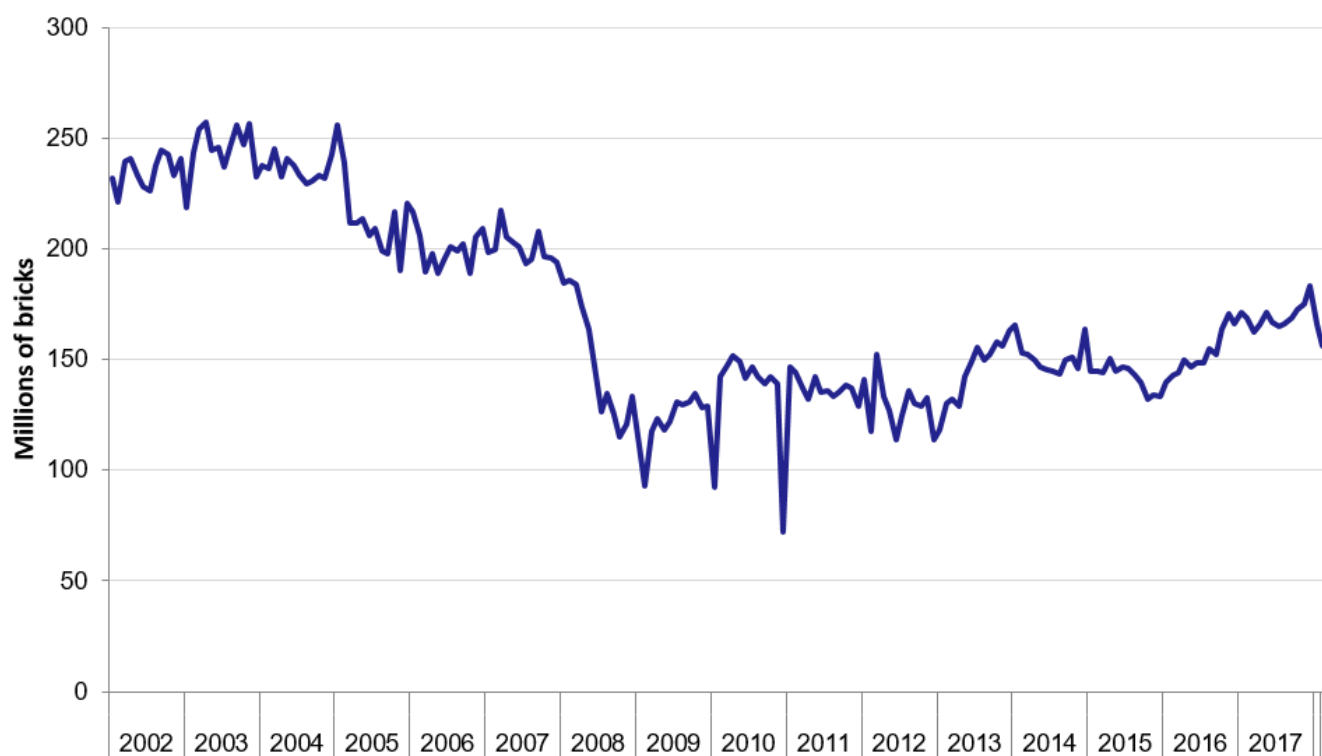
- Ready-mixed concrete sales **decreased 1.9%** in Quarter 4 2017 compared to Quarter 3 2017, according to the seasonally adjusted data.
- This followed a 2.3% **decrease** in Quarter 3 2017.
- Sales in Quarter 4 2017 **decreased** by **5.1%** compared to the same quarter in the previous year, following a **5.1% decrease** in Quarter 3 2017, on the same basis.

The seasonally adjusted data show that the lowest quarterly sales in the post-recession period occurred in Quarter 4 2010, which included extreme winter conditions.

Sales have steadily recovered since Quarter 2 2012, although they have failed to reach pre-recession levels.

## Bricks

**Chart 5: Seasonally Adjusted  
Deliveries of Bricks, GB**  
Number of bricks



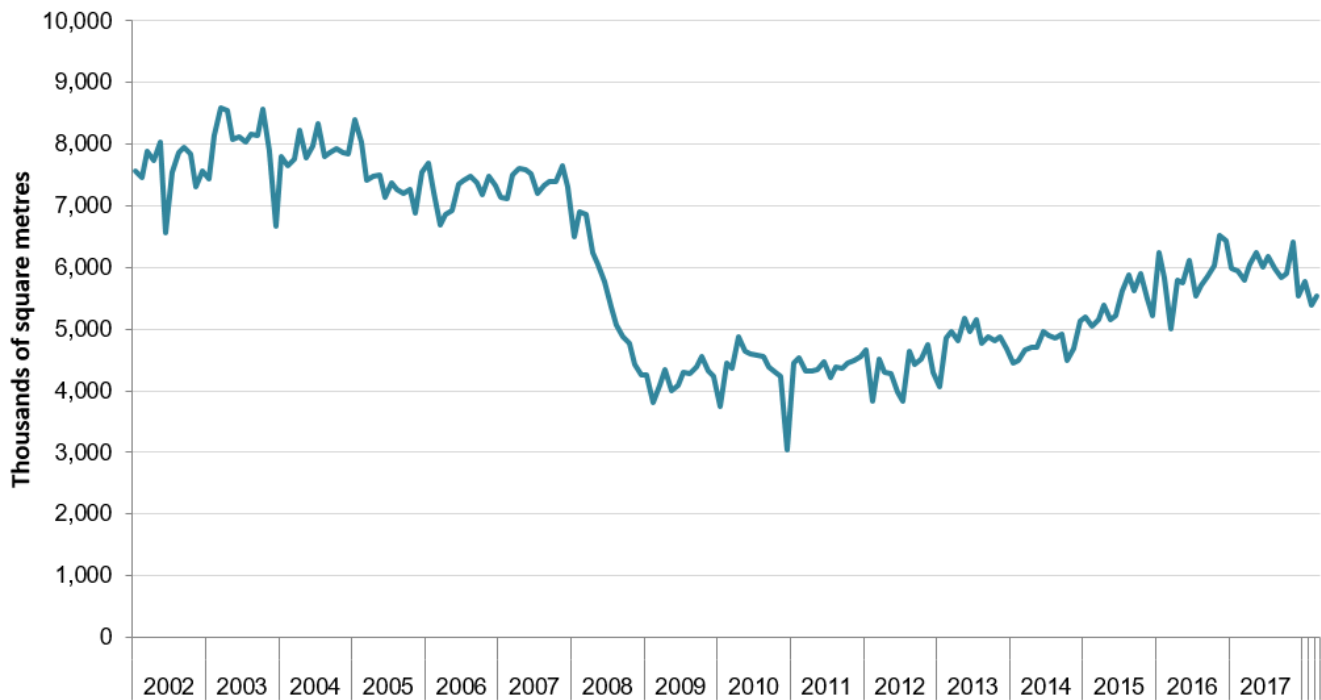
Source: Table 9, Monthly Statistics of Building Materials and Components

- There was a **4.8% decrease** in brick deliveries in April 2018 compared to April 2017, according to the seasonally adjusted figures.
- This followed a 3.7% decrease in March 2018, on the same basis.
- The month-on-month change shows a **1.0% increase** in April 2018.
- This followed a 6.2% decrease in March 2018, on the same basis.

Brick deliveries declined during the recession and reached their lowest value during the extreme cold weather in December 2010. Deliveries were at their lowest point in October 2015 since April 2013.

## Blocks

**Chart 6: Seasonally Adjusted Deliveries  
of Concrete Blocks, GB**  
Area of concrete blocks



Source: Table 11, Monthly Statistics of Building Materials and Components

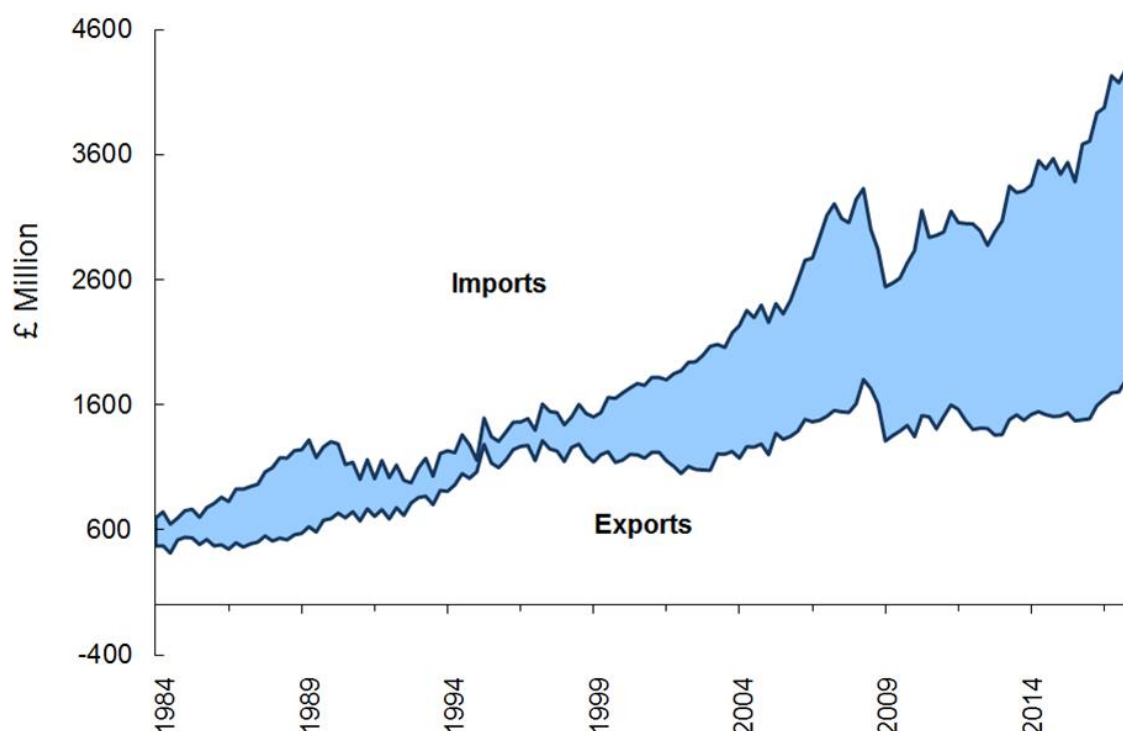
- There was an **8.6% decrease** in concrete block deliveries in April 2018 compared to April 2017, according to the seasonally adjusted figures.
- This followed a 7.2% decrease in March 2018, on the same basis.
- The month-on-month change shows a **2.8% increase** in April 2018.
- This followed a 6.8% decrease in March 2018, on the same basis.

Concrete block deliveries declined during the recession and reached their lowest value during the extreme cold weather in December 2010. Since then the trend has varied from month to month but the general trend year has been one of growth in concrete block deliveries.



## Imports and Exports of Construction Materials

**Chart 7: Exports and Imports of Construction Materials, UK.**  
value in pound sterling



Source: Table 14, Monthly Statistics of Building Materials and Components

**Imports** of construction materials **increased** by £313 million in the first quarter of 2018 (to £4,467 million) compared to the previous quarter, an increase of 7.53%.

**Exports** of construction materials **increased** in the first quarter of 2018 by £7 million (to £1,801 million), a 0.4% increase.

As a result, the **trade deficit narrowed** by £305.3 million to £2,666 million in Quarter 1 2018, an increase of 12.9%.

Over the period from Quarter 1 1984 to Quarter 1 2018, construction materials imports have increased, on average (per quarter), by 4.0%. Over the same period, exports increased by an average of 2.1% per quarter.

The trade deficit was historically at its smallest throughout the 1990s, with a mean of £0.3 billion over this period. This trade deficit was 24% of the value of imports. Currently (Quarter 1 2018), the trade deficit is £2666 million, 60% of the value of imports.

**Table 2: Top-5 Exported and Imported Construction Materials in 2017\***

£ million

Top-5 Exported Materials		Top-5 Imported Materials	
Electrical Wires	855	Electrical Wires	1,928
Paints & Varnishes	669	Lamps & Fittings	991
Plugs & Sockets	430	Sawn Wood > 6mm thick	859
Lamps & Fittings	381	Air Conditioning Equipment	657
Air Conditioning Equipment	374	Central Heating Boilers	641

Source: Table 14, Monthly Statistics of Building Materials and Components

The top five exported materials in 2017 accounted for 38% of total construction material exports.

The top five imported construction materials in 2017 accounted for 30% of total construction material imports.

\* Due to a processing issue, trade information for some products for 2017 was incorrect in both the commentary and table 14 in the February, March and April bulletins. The issue did not affect total trade figures given, or table 15. This issue has now been resolved and the data corrected. We apologise for any inconvenience caused.

**Table 3: UK Trade of Construction Materials with EU and Non-EU Countries, 2017**

£million (% of total trade in italics)

All Building Materials & Components	EU	Non-EU
Imports	10,276 60%	6,710 40%
Exports	4,357 61%	2,760 39%

Source: Table 15 Monthly Statistics of Building Materials and Components

Compared to pre-recession levels in 2007, the share of total UK construction material exports going to the EU has declined from 70% to 61%.

**Table 4: Top 5 UK Export and Import Markets for Construction Materials in 2017**

£ million

Top-5 Export Markets		Top-5 Import Markets	
Republic of Ireland	1,037	China	2,849
Germany	778	Germany	2,477
USA	594	Italy	1,081
France	590	Netherlands	847
Netherlands	565	Spain	845

Source: HMRC Overseas Trade Statistics

The top five export markets comprised 50% of total construction materials exports in 2017. The Republic of Ireland remains the largest market, despite having shrunk from a pre-recession peak of 27% of total exports in 2007, to 15% in 2017.

The top 5 import markets comprised 48% of total construction materials imports in 2017. 17% of all imports are from China.

The '[Rotterdam Effect](#)' (also known as the '[Antwerp Effect](#)') may affect trade figures. This is explained in detail by [HM Revenue & Customs](#).

## Economic Background

### Construction Output

The most recent [construction output](#) figures for March 2018 were published by the **Office for National Statistics** on 10<sup>th</sup> May 2018.

#### *Key points:*

- Construction output continued its recent decline in the three-month on three-month series, falling by 2.7% in March 2018, the biggest fall seen in this series since August 2012.
- The three-month on three-month decrease in construction output was driven by falls in both repair and maintenance, and new work, which fell 2.8% and 2.6% respectively.
- Following several months of consistently strong growth, private housing also experienced a slowdown in March 2018, contracting in the three-month on three-month series by 1.6%.
- Construction output also fell in the month-on-month series, contracting by 2.3% in March 2018.
- Office for National Statistics has received some anecdotal information from a small number of survey respondents regarding the effect of adverse weather on their businesses in February and March 2018; the adverse weather conditions across Great Britain could have potentially contributed to the decline in construction output, although it is difficult to quantify the exact impact on the industry.
- The estimate for construction growth in Quarter 1 (Jan to Mar) 2018 has been revised up 0.6 percentage points to negative 2.7%, from negative 3.3% in the preliminary estimate of gross domestic product (GDP), which has no impact on quarterly GDP growth to one decimal place.

### Bank of England Summary of Business Conditions

The **Bank of England** published its latest update to the Agents' Summary of Business Conditions on 16<sup>th</sup> May 2018, covering intelligence gathered between late February 2018 and mid-April 2018.

#### *Key points:*

- Consumer spending growth slowed markedly, which was in part due to the adverse weather experienced in February and March.
- Recruitment difficulties which had been a primary concern, became more broad-based. This is reported to be partly due to the reduced availability of EU migrant workers. Total labour cost growth rose.
- Construction output growth slower further, in part due to the poor weather, but also due to the delay of projects following the collapse of Carillion.
- The housing market remained subdued overall. Demand had decreased and supply was also weak, whereas previously demand for new homes had been robust due to the Help to Buy Scheme.

### Gross Domestic Product Estimate

The **Office for National Statistics** published a preliminary estimate of gross domestic product for Quarter 1 2018 on 25<sup>th</sup> May.

#### *Key points:*

- GDP is estimated to have increased by 1.4% in Quarter 1 2018 compared to Quarter 1 2017, and upward revision of 0.2%.
- GDP is estimated to have increased by 0.1% in Quarter 1 2018 compared to Quarter 4 2017.
- Construction output decreased by 2.7% in Quarter 1 2018 compared to Quarter 1 2017, an upward revision of 0.6%.
- Construction output decreased by 2.7% in Quarter 1 2018 compared to Quarter 4 2017, an upward revision of 0.6%.

## Gross Domestic Product Forecast

The latest monthly **Consensus Economics** [forecast survey](#) (which uses an average of private sector forecasts) results were published in May 2018.

### *Key points:*

- The mean GDP growth forecast for 2018 is 1.4% growth, 0.1% decrease from last month.
- The mean GDP growth forecast for 2019 is 1.5% growth, revised down 0.1% from the preliminary estimate.

The **Office for Budget Responsibility** published its most recent [Economic and Fiscal Outlook](#) on 13<sup>th</sup> March 2018.

### *Key point:*

- The GDP growth forecast for 2018 was unchanged from the November 2017 and remains at 1.4%.

## Construction Output Forecasts

In April 2018, **Experian** published their [forecasts](#) for the construction sector.

### *Key points:*

- Output is expected to increase by an average of 1.1%; by 0.2% in 2018, by 1.2% in 2019 and 2.0% in 2020.
- Public housing and private housing will slow down, but continue to rise steadily through the forecast period.
- The infrastructure sector is forecast to continue to recover from a 9.3% downturn in 2016, it grew 10.2% in 2017 and is forecast to grow by 5% in 2018, 11% in 2019 and 4% in 2020.
- Private commercial building grew by 5.5% in 2017, but is forecast to decrease by 7% in 2018, 6% in 2019, before increasing by 1% in 2020. Thought to be due to a more cautious attitude from investors and developers in light of the EU Referendum vote in June 2016.

The **Construction Products Association** published their Spring [forecasts](#) for the construction sector in April 2018.

### *Key points:*

- Overall, construction output is forecast to increase by 0.1% in 2018
- Construction activity during 2018 is expected to remain flat despite significant growth in private house building and infrastructure due to declines in commercial offices and retail activity as well industrial factories. Without this growth in housing and infrastructure, output would fall by 2.0% in 2018

- In 2019, construction output is forecast to rise by 2.7% as infrastructure projects drive industry activity; and in 2020, construction output is forecast to rise by 1.9%

## Manufacturing

The latest **Index of Production** data for March 2018 were [published](#) on 10<sup>th</sup> May 2018 by the Office for National Statistics.

*Key points for the SIC 23.1-4/7-9 industry* (includes the manufacture of bricks, tiles and other construction products):

- When comparing March 2018 with March 2017, **output decreased by 0.6%.**
- When comparing March 2018 with February 2018, **output increased by 0.6%**

*Key points for the SIC 23.5-6 industry* (includes the manufacture of concrete, cement and other products for construction purposes):

- When comparing March 2018 with March 2017, **output decreased by 4.1%.**
- When comparing March 2018 with February 2018, **output decreased by 15.6%.**

## Background notes

### Quality information for the Building Materials bulletin

1. The United Kingdom Statistics Authority has designated these statistics as National Statistics, in accordance with the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007 and signifying compliance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics.

Designation can be broadly interpreted to mean that the statistics:

- meet identified user needs;
- are well explained and readily accessible;
- are produced according to sound methods, and
- are managed impartially and objectively in the public interest.

Once statistics have been designated as National Statistics it is a statutory requirement that the Code of Practice shall continue to be observed. The full assessment [report](#), published on 22nd December 2011, can be found on the UK Statistics Authority website.

2. As of 3<sup>rd</sup> August 2016, this publication is published by the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS). All references to the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) made in this publication refer to when it was published by BIS. This has made no impact to the content of the publication.
3. In work done for BIS on improving the quality of statistics published in the Monthly Statistics of Building Materials and Components, the Office for National Statistics' Methodology Advisory Service (MAS) recommended that BIS should start seasonally adjusting key data series (see [ONS/MAS review of building materials statistics: final report](#) for more detail). Seasonal adjustment is widely used in official statistics and aids data interpretation by removing effects associated with the time of the year or arrangement of the calendar. Seasonal effects frequently obscure features of interest in data, such as long term trends and the effects of unusual occurrences. By removing seasonal effects, users can more readily identify the features of interest.

Following advice from the MAS, and the results of a consultation (see the [results of the BIS consultation on seasonal adjustment](#) for more detail), BIS agreed to publish seasonally adjusted data for the following series:

Sand and gravel, total sales  
Concrete blocks, all types deliveries  
Bricks, all types deliveries  
Ready-mixed concrete, deliveries

For the initial publication of seasonally adjusted data, data from 1983 onwards will be seasonally adjusted. Subsequently, for each monthly publication, data up to 12 months or 4 quarters previous to the new data point will be revised. Upon the completion of each year's data series, data for the previous 12 years will be revised. BIS will publish both non-seasonally adjusted and seasonally adjusted data in the tables of this publication. From the June 2015

Edition this publication will only use seasonally adjusted data in the commentary for these series.

4. Quality issues related to the *Building Materials and Components* outputs are discussed in the review of the Building Material statistics that was carried out in 2010 by BIS's construction team. The review aimed to: ascertain user needs; examine whether existing data collection methodologies are fit for purpose; estimate compliance costs; assess compliance with the Code of Practice; and identify options for change.

The full [report](#) can be found on the BIS *Building Materials and Components* webpage.

Detailed information on data suppliers, coverage and data collection methodology can be found in sections 2.1-2.10. Quality issues (coverage and accuracy of sample panels, response rates, survey results processing, disclosure etc.) and potential measures that could be employed to improve the quality of the statistics are discussed in section 2.11 of the review. Users' views on the quality of the *Building Materials and Components* statistics are given in section 3.3.4. These are derived from a user survey carried out in early 2010, as part of the review (see section 3 for details).

5. Following the review, BIS acted on the recommendations including commissioning the Office for National Statistics Methodology Advisory Service (ONS/MAS) to address some of the recommendations from the 2010 review. In July 2011, MAS published their [interim report](#). In July 2012, MAS published their [final report](#).
6. HM Revenue and Customs use administrative sources to produce Overseas Trade Statistics. A [Statement of Administrative Sources](#) used to compile construction material trade statistics is available on the BIS *Building Materials and Components* webpage:

Separately, HM Revenue and Customs also have a [Statement of Administrative Sources](#) which covers Overseas Trade Statistics.

7. [The pre-announcement of any major changes to samples or methodology](#) also details some methodological changes to the collection of data.
8. The following table gives a summary of response rates related to some of the latest survey results. Where the response rate is less than 100%, estimates are made for missing values.

For latest data used	Bulletin table number	Response rate
Quarterly Sand and Gravel	4, 5 & 6	89%
Quarterly Sand and Gravel – Land Won	4, 5 & 6	90%
Quarterly Sand and Gravel – Marine Dredged	4, 5 & 6	87%
Quarterly Slate	7	100%
Quarterly Concrete Roofing Tiles	13	100%
Monthly Bricks Provisional data	9	89%
Monthly Bricks Final data	9 & 10	100%
Monthly Concrete Blocks	11	89%

9. Change to the methodology for the land-won sand and gravel surveys. Previously we have used information from the Annual Minerals Raised Inquiry (AMRI) run by the Department for Communities and Local Government (now the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government) in order to select the sample of sites which received the land-won sand and gravel survey and to weight the results to reflect the population. MHCLG no longer run AMRI, and so



we have had to make changes to the sand and gravel surveys, which took effect from Q1 2017. The changes are:

- We have changed the survey from a sample to a census, so that we now send forms to all sites identified as producing sand and/or gravel. This has increased our panel from about 200 sites to around 500, and means that we will no longer need to weight the returns. We will still need to impute for any non-response.
- We refreshed our panel of sites using information from the British Geological Survey, ensuring that it was up-to-date.
- We made the survey statutory, bringing it into line with the marine-dredged sand and gravel survey which was already statutory. This means that respondents are required to complete the survey under the Statistics of Trade Act 1947.

## Uses of the data

10. The *Building Materials and Components* statistics are used for a variety of purposes, including policy development and evaluation concerning the construction products industry, as well as monitoring market trends. In a wider context, the figures are regularly reported in the construction press to facilitate market analysis and business planning for its wide range of readers. The statistics are also increasingly used by financial institutions for assessing market information and industry trends. For more information on the uses of the Building Materials statistics, their usefulness to users and users' views on the quality of these statistics, see Section 3 of the *Building Materials and Components* [review](#).

## Related Statistics

11. [Construction Statistics: Sources and Outputs](#) lists the known sources of information available on the construction industry and their outputs. These include information on employees, employment, enterprises, output and new orders in the construction industry as well as the contribution of the industry to the economy. Related information, for example housing, is also included.
12. The [Construction Statistics Annual](#) brings together a wide range of statistics currently available on the construction industry from a variety of sources and provides a broad perspective on statistical trends in the construction industry, with some international comparisons.
13. In its monthly **Index of Production (IoP)** [publication](#), the Office for National Statistics publishes Gross Value Added (seasonally adjusted, UK) data for the following two industries:
  - SIC 23.1-4/7-9 industry, which includes the manufacture of bricks, tiles and other construction products.
  - SIC 23.5-6 industry, which includes the manufacture of concrete, cement and other products for construction purposes.

These data are not directly comparable with the data in this bulletin, due to differences in coverage and methodology. They are nevertheless useful in illustrating the latest output trends of related construction materials as measured by the Office for National Statistics.



## Revisions

14. Our [revisions policy](#) can be found on the BEIS Building Materials webpage.
15. [The pre-announcement of any major changes to samples or methodology](#) and [Summary of Revisions](#) give further information on revisions and other changes to data and can also be found on the BEIS Building Materials webpage.

## Pre-release access

16. No [pre-release access](#) is granted to this publication.

## Further information

The coverage of cement and cementitious statistics changed from UK to GB in 2002 due to data confidentiality issues in Northern Ireland as the number of manufacturers decreased. Where the coverage of figures for other building materials is limited to Great Britain (i.e. sales of sand and gravel, and production, deliveries and stocks of slate, clinker, bricks, concrete building blocks and concrete roofing tiles), no equivalent data are collected for Northern Ireland.

The most recently published bulletin and accompanying data tables can be found on BIS' *Building Materials and Components* [website](#).

Accompanying tables with data relating to 2011 are accessible from [this](#) link.

Accompanying tables for 2005 - 2010 are accessible from [this](#) link.

Requests for older data should be sent to [MaterialStats@beis.gov.uk](mailto:MaterialStats@beis.gov.uk).

*Please send us any comments or feedback you may have about this commentary.*

**Next publication:** 4<sup>th</sup> July 2018

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