

## UK Project Management Round Up



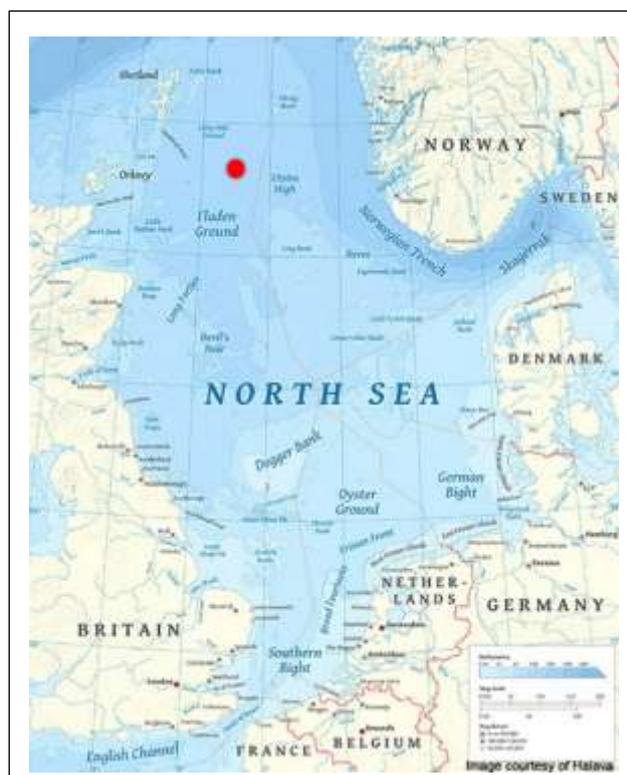
*By Miles Shepherd*  
*Executive Advisor & International Correspondent*  
*Salisbury, England, UK*

### INTRODUCTION

You will see that this issue of your favourite online PM journal is special. Your editor, David Pells, has brought you fifty-nine editions and this is the sixtieth. My own record is somewhat less and this is the fifty-first report on the PM world from a UK perspective. I will try to make this report a little different from others this year but events in UK are dominated by matters that I have reported over list last year - the General Election, BREXIT and a serious project failure in the aftermath of a devastating fire. Although much depends on your personal perspective, none of this news is good but as always, there is some good news if you look for it. But as project managers, we need to analyse events and learn lessons.

### THE GOOD NEWS

The good news is that several long-term projects have come in more or less successfully. First, the **Kraken oil field** has begun production. This \$2.5 billion development lies to the east of the Shetland Isle, off Scotland's north coast. The operator, Enquest, reports that the project was delivered on time and at well under the \$3.2 billion budget. Experts estimate that Kraken could produce around 5% of the North Sea output by the time it hits peak production sometime in 2019. The field is estimated to hold about 135 million barrels and although first discovered in 1985, was not developed as the heavy oil it holds is more difficult and therefore expensive to extract. However, case the changing price of oil couple with the improvements in extraction techniques



resulted in a revised business that shows the field is an economic proposition. Deliver rate is expected to be up to 50,000 barrels per day by 2019 and has an estimated life of 25 years.

Next up is the opening of the **new extension to the Victoria and Albert Museum** in London's Exhibition Road quarter. Rising from the ashes of a failed project in 2004, the new extension has come in on time and on budget at £54.5 million. The museum suffered major embarrassment in 2004 when it failed to secure funding of £100 million despite eight years of fundraising. It was unable to implement Daniel Libeskind's Spiral design which took after the then recently completed Bilbao Guggenheim. The Spiral was a vast tower of tumbling boxes, which some experts considered to be of questionable worth as exhibition space despite its sensational impact.

This may have been a blessing in disguise as the Spiral would have offered a series of fairly small galleries with lots of connecting stairs). The requirement that emerged was a less grandiose extension that provided one very large gallery where temporary exhibitions could be staged. The result opens as I write and consists of a new plaza surmounting a huge underground gallery.



The Sackler Courtyard

The museum lies in a heavily built-up site and is a Grade 1 listed building. The five year project was undertaken while the museum was fully operational. Design was by London-based architect Amanda Levete, the new Sackler Gallery is rated as a game-changing addition to the museum's arsenal of exhibition spaces.

The most visible change is the new-look Aston Webb Screen. This masked the old boiler rooms but the old solid facade has been replaced with a permeable colonnade, based on the architect's original vision, to create a second entrance to the museum and connect the Science and Natural History Museums on Exhibition Road.



New underground gallery. Courtesy V&A Museum

The new gates, provide security at night and preserve the memory of the Second World War bombs that dug holes in its façade.

Beyond the grade I listed screen, lies the world's first "porcelain courtyard" — a link to the V&A's spectacular ceramics collection. In the Courtyard 11,000 handmade tiles, with red and yellow decoration apparently representing "urban flowers" provide a spectacular open space that is intended to sparkle in the rain and glow in the sun.

While on the subject of history, there is further news of a continuing project in the Stonehenge World Heritage site. Now actually at Stonehenge, but at Avebury some 20 miles away. A **new stone "circle"** has been discovered by a team from the University of Leicester. This is quite a surprise as most archeologist thought there was nothing more to find in the way of stones, and this is actually a square some 38 metres on a side. The archaeologist and marmalade magnate, Alexander Keiller, discovered a line of standing stones near the 6m (19ft) upright stone known as the Obelisk some 80 years ago.

Avebury is significantly larger than Stonehenge, 330m (1,082ft) wide stone circle is thought to have been built between about 2850 BC and 2200 BC. It consists of three stone circles and 100 huge standing stones originally. It has attracted considerable archaeological interest since the 17th century.

The final bit of good news is that **HMS Queen Elizabeth** has left the Naval Dockyard at Rosyth for sea trials. These trials are regarded as a project in their own right but represent a major milestone on the wider carrier development programme. According to a press release from the Royal Navy, HMS Queen Elizabeth is Britain's biggest ever warship. It took to the water for the first time as June drew to a close as she was moved out of dry dock. With just two metres to spare at either side of the 65,000-tonne aircraft carrier, a flotilla of tugs inched the ship from the dock where she was constructed to a neighbouring jetty where she'll be completed over the next two years. After a two-day operation to flood the cavernous dry dock, tugs began the delicate task of moving the leviathan in her entirety for the first time. It took just three hours to complete the 'float out' – an operation which took place 13 days after Her Majesty the Queen officially named the vessel in a spectacular ceremony.



HMS Queen Elizabeth at the jetty. Courtesy Royal Navy

## THE BAD NEWS

This month the bad news is not confined to BREXIT, which is going very badly with a much weakened negotiating situation, but rests on a tragic event and total lack of project management.

**BREXIT** was always going to be a challenge as the contrarian momentum of the past year continues. Here in UK we had the unexpected result in the referendum last year, in USA we saw the apparently unlikely election of Mr Trump and now, back in UK we have seen a very unexpected General Election result with a surge in popular support for the strongly Marxist line of Corbyn. The result of the election is a serious erosion of the UK negotiating team. In project terms, the position of the Sponsor has been seriously eroded as UK looks to be in two minds over what it wants and what it has to offer in the negotiations. With no clear view of what success looks like, it is extremely difficult to know when the end point has been achieved.

One possible outcome that is gaining traction is that we may not leave the EU after all. The door to withdrawing Article 50 (the notification to withdraw) has been left open by the EU negotiating team while more and more people are seeing the problems that are piling up as the enormity of leaving becomes more clear. This is not a political view, as some of the more astute voters are seeing, but simply a matter of practicality. Only time will tell but many in UK are hoping something can be salvaged from the train wreck that is “wisdom of the crowd”.

Unable to sleep on the night of 14 June, I turned on the TV to catch up on the news at about 03.00 to see the most shocking sight as a 23 story apartment block was on fire. **Grenfell Tower** in West London was ablaze. That anyone escaped seems a miracle but the emergency services reacted with speed and efficiency to save many people.

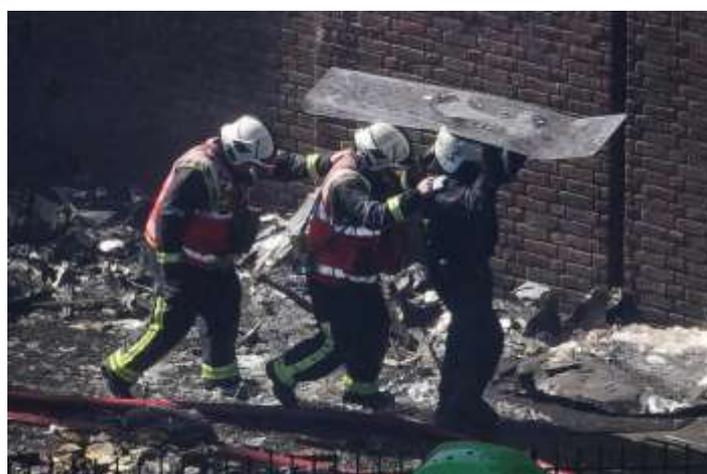


Progression of the Grenfell Tower disaster. Pictures courtesy BBC.

These events are tragic and the loss of life appalling and we are now in the post event search for someone to blame. Left wing spin doctors, led by some well-known media organisations, are turning the aftermath into a political crisis. I want to look at the project issues, rather than the political aspects but I cannot help thinking that some of those who shout the loudest have themselves failed in their duty of care, too. The BBC is a public service broadcaster yet they have broadcast no advice on what to do in the event of fire, how to escape, when to stay put or answers to any of the aspects they are accusing others of not telling the public.

Little good has so far emerged from this tragedy, apart from the heroism of the fire services. Arriving minutes after the alarm was raised, they battled for hours to contain the blaze, which is thought to have started in a refrigerator on the fourth floor and spread rapidly to other floors

The project management aspects start with the original construction which was completed in 1974, at a time when there were many scandals in public sector construction. However, the building was renovated in 2016. Some design decisions and material selections will be criticized but much of this is not PM related but down to the Sponsor, and will be carefully scrutinised at the Public Inquiry.



Police escorting firefighters into Grenfell Tower. Photo London News Pictures and Sky News.

More importantly, post disaster reactions have been shambolic. There was no disaster project plan, individual NGOs and local residents did the best they could but there was no coordinated plan, no preplanning and little central leadership on display. **Professor Stephen Wearne** of Manchester University has consistently advocated the need for disaster project management planning and preparation. Readers will find relevant reports by Prof Wearne in the PM World Library but the main message is that while the cause of disasters are many and varied (and thus unpredictable) it is the outcomes that need to be managed and these are, by and large, predictable. Thus it is possible to plan for a variety of disaster outcomes, as the major NGOs such as Save the Children, Oxfam, Medicine sans Frontières and others do for overseas events.

The difference in the Grenfell Tower disaster is that it was in UK, not overseas. We can manage the immediate emergency control but we have little experience in dealing with the longer term after effects. The public seems to think it is possible to suddenly manage the needs of 127 families, find them new places to live, replace

simple possessions such as clothing, bedding and food. The fact that public expectations are unrealistic are irrelevant, prompt if temporary action needs to be taken to alleviate short term needs to allow time to be gained to deal with the longer-term issues. Comparisons with the efforts overseas take no account of the living conditions in the aftermath – most emergency housing in the aftermath of an earthquake or forest fire are tented. Erecting a small tent city on a green space in the London suburbs would shock the media as well as the general public. However, much more could, and should, have been done and the only way to deal with such a situation is to have plans. In the dim, distant past we had bodies such as Civil defence to think the unthinkable and plan our reactions. So we need to think much more about Disaster Project Management and Professor Wearne's well thought out ideas.

### **CLOSING REMARKS**

Recent times have been very depressing in UK, Little forethought seems to have been applied to some important events such as the General Election and Brexit while the lack of planning and preparation for civil disaster is been conspicuous by its absence. While these aspects of modern life have been widely reported in the "meeja" who are always alert for ways to criticize without accepting any responsibility themselves, there are silver linings to these dark clouds. Some infrastructure projects are coming in as planned and defence procurement has had some successes. So all is not lost, but much of our civilization relies on Project Management to achieve success.

## About the Author



### **MILES SHEPHERD**

Salisbury, UK



**Miles Shepherd** is an executive editorial advisor and international correspondent for PM World in the United Kingdom. He is also managing director for MS Projects Ltd, a consulting company supporting various UK and overseas Government agencies, nuclear industry organisations and other businesses. Miles has over 30 years' experience on a variety of projects in UK, Eastern Europe and Russia. His PM experience includes defence, major IT projects, decommissioning of nuclear reactors, nuclear security, rail and business projects for the UK Government and EU. Past Chair and Fellow of the Association for Project Management (APM), Miles is also past president and chair of the International Project Management Association (IPMA). He is currently a Director for PMI's Global Accreditation Centre and is immediate past Chair of the ISO committee developing new international standards for Project Management and for Program/Portfolio Management. He was involved in setting up APM's team developing guidelines for project management oversight and governance. Miles is based in Salisbury, England and can be contacted at [miles.shepherd@msp-ltd.co.uk](mailto:miles.shepherd@msp-ltd.co.uk).

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