

UK Project Management Round Up



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INTRODUCTION

As noted elsewhere, time flies when you are having fun, and this is my last report for the first half of the year. Mid-summer is only a matter of days away but according to the BBC, we are still in Spring and they have a wild-life programme to prove it.

This month there is more good news to report in the form of carbon emission reduction, new project awards and architectural awards. There is also some not so good news for some UK mega projects, and some other news (can't decide if it is good or not) on Artificial Intelligence (AI). And to finish off another busy month, I have some news about time that will reach parts that the other reports can't reach.

GOOD NEWS

Green power



Photo: Getty Images

The above image may be one of the last pictures of a British coal fired power station as the government plans to close all the UK's coal plants by 2025. The National Grid is working to ensure fully fossil free generation across the grid by the same date. Significantly, we have just ended a record-breaking coal free generation period. The coal free power record now stands at 18 day 6 hours. Only a few weeks ago, I filed a report on the record being extended to 5 days, but this is a step change. Apparently, the resumption of a coal contribution was necessitated by the mass switch on to a reality TV show that I somehow seem to have omitted from my personal schedule. The @UK_Coal Twitter account, which tracks coal's share of the grid, confirmed coal's share of the mix peaked at 1.06 per cent overnight before dropping back down to 0.11 per cent this morning.

While coal was off the grid, gas provided 40 per cent of demand, nuclear met 20 per cent, wind provided 13 per cent, imports delivered 11 per cent, biomass eight per cent, solar seven per cent, and both large hydro and storage projects provided less than one per cent each. Now we need to work on reducing the dependence on gas.

New Projects

Many of the major UK corporates have announced new projects: Babcock will start work on a new contract for fixed wing air ambulance services in Norway and a new LPG project while completing a key stage in the naval dockyard programme at DUQM, in Oman.

Engineering conglomerate Bombardier has announced that it is the preferred bidder for a £3.9 Bn project to supply rolling stock for a new light railway in Egypt. The monorail will be built in two sections, east and west of Cairo. Tourist hot spots around Giza will be linked to the city. The contract supplies 70 four car trains and will be exported to Egypt between 2021 and 2024.

Project Progress

Just when you thought offshore oil was no longer news comes the announcement from BP that they have just started Phase 2 of their Thunder Horse South expansion project. This is a long way from the bad old days nine years ago when we were watching the Deepwater Horizon disaster unfold.

Stirling Prize

For those who don't follow what UK architects are up to, the Stirling Prize is the main award by the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA). Actually, it is more than just a single prize as there are regional awards as well. The prize is presented to "the architects of the building that has made the greatest contribution to the evolution of architecture in the past year."

This is a high-profile award and has an extended timetable. Each of the countries in the United Kingdom makes its own (National) awards while England makes awards in 9 regions. A total of 83 National and Regional award winners were announced in May

while the national winners will be announced this month. This long list is whittled down into a short list to be announced in July. The overall award is presented in October and has been televised in previous years.

Having had a peek at the long list, I would put my money on the Macallan Visitor Centre at Craigellachnie, and not just for obvious reasons! Architects Rogers Stirk Harbour and Partners have designed a building that blends wonderfully into its environment while producing an amazing and effective contribution to the estate.



The Macallan Visitor Centre (Photo: The Macallan)

Another Scottish contender must be Stallan-Brand's wonderfully styled Broomlands Primary School in Kelso.

This is a new build project with 4 classrooms, a nursery, communal areas, and games and dining halls. The Design and Build contract included external works like new parking provisions, access roads and landscaping. The existing school remained in use while the new school was constructed.



Broomlands Primary School (Photo McLaughlan and Harvey)

The school uses space that can respond to the many different learning styles so that it can be used on a one to one basis or for larger cluster teaching arrangements.

According to the architects, the school can also take advantage of an ideal orientation with classroom elevations facing either east or west to avoid glare, overheating and helping encourage cross ventilation. Community sports areas open up towards the south to create a complete learning campus environment.



Whitchurch Silk Mill (Photo: Basingstoke Gazette)

Closer to home, I had to admire the Whitchurch Silk Mill entry. This is not a new build but a refurbished Georgian silk mill, situated in the charming English countryside that has been sensitively preserved and extended to encapsulate the rich history of the silk mill. According to the RIBA summary, “The architects have thoughtfully delivered a renovated space for the community and visitors alike, that is truly a joy to experience. What really stood out for the judges was, not only the delicate

restoration, but the care in which the client and architect gave to ensuring the space became an interactive learning environment, with additional rooms for understanding how the old silk mill used to function during Victorian times and information on how it continues to produce beautiful fabrics.

There are another 80 entries on the long list – not sure I would want to be a judge faced with such spectacular design projects...

Historic Projects

Following on from last month’s disaster story about the destruction of Notre Dame comes news of many design projects covering full traditional restoration to modernistic replacement of the destroyed spires envisaged by some French architects (see right) comes news of several British proposals. However, what takes the eye is a new project to build a park and gardens on the Champs de Mars, the area around the Eiffel Tower. Paris Mayor **Anne Hidalgo** thinks Parisians will flock to an area that they have avoided long avoided. London based American landscape architect **Kathryn Gustavson** has been commissioned to design the €72 Million project in time for the 2024 Olympic Games.



Design proposal for Notre Dame
(Credit: Vincent Callebaut Architectures)

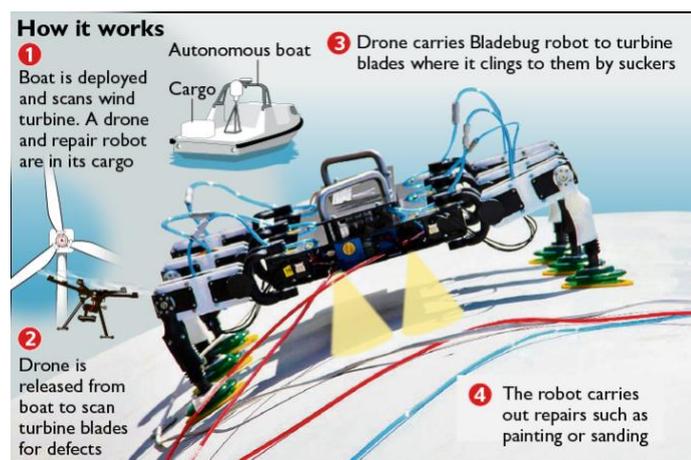
NOT CLASSIFIED NEWS

Artificial Intelligence (AI) seems to be everywhere these days so it was reassuring to see that not all jobs will be taken over by a bunch of faceless robots. On the other hand, there are some jobs that could usefully be done by machine to save danger, discomfort and drudgery. One such task is maintaining wind farms. According to reports in *The Times*, robot boats equipped with drones guided by AI will be able to repair turbines and carry out routine maintenance.

A consortium of scientists, arms manufacturers and green energy experts claim that a £4 million government funded project will develop an autonomous mothership that will transport a fleet of self-piloting drones, which will carry a swarm of six-legged, insect-like robots known as Bladebugs.

These devices will be able to cling to the blades of wind turbines and assess them for wear and tear as well carrying out basic repairs such as

sanding and repainting damaged areas. According to *The Times*, the system will use AI techniques pioneered by NASA to run unmanned space missions. Tests are expected to take place at Levenmouth using a wind turbine owned by a renewable energy research facility funded by the government.



Bladebugs (Graphic: The Times)

NOT SO GOOD NEWS

Rail Projects

Complaining about the railway system in UK is almost a national sport and comes a close second to whining about the weather. However, there are clearly problem projects in this sector. The engineering is OK but some of the planning seems adrift, particularly at Crossrail where the work to integrate the signaling systems is even more problematic than expected. However, it is a case of giving a dog a bad name and other Crossrail activities are now attracting criticism. Employing 500 drivers despite a two-year delay in completion has been criticized and a similar situation with 200 technicians and engineers has also come under scrutiny. These latter are being paid to “practice” according to press reports. It is not clear why these people are not used in testing the signaling and drivers diverted to other franchises. The drivers were recruited before the delays so it seems unreasonable to complain especially as some will be needed to drive trains during the testing.

High Speed 2 (HS2) is also getting some stick. Armchair critics have come up with the idea that HS2 costs can be cut by using existing track for the eastern extension – Birmingham to Leeds via the East Midlands – at a cost saving of about £52 Million. This would entail running trains via Manchester and on to Leeds via a tunnel rather than building new lines to the east. Other suggestions include running HS2 trains at a slower speed and halt outside London. These ideas seem to undermine the business case but come from the House of Lords economic affairs committee which claims that the project costs are out of control, a similar accusation to that leveled at Crossrail. It is difficult to see how much of these recommendations are valid as there is so much lobbying for sectional interests, but it is late to be reviewing business cases. Certainly alternative plans can be considered to reduce costs but some of these ideas are so fundamental that they destroy some of the main reasons for the design concepts.

The Government is also under pressure over rail projects. Stagecoach, one of Britain's biggest rail operators is to sue the Department for Transport, alleging a breach of statutory duty. Stagecoach began legal action over its exclusion from bidding for a new franchise in the East Midlands. Could this be linked to the re-routing ideas we have just noted? This franchise has seen much disquiet recently and it looks like Arriva, who lost the franchise to Dutch-owned Abelio, might also take legal action. Both groups are alleged to have submitted knowingly non-compliant bids when they refused to take on the pension commitments said to be £7.5 bn in debt.

As if franchising challenges were not enough, a major shut down of busy commuter routes is scheduled for this summer and guess who is getting the blame? Despite giving 10 weeks' notice, passenger groups are agitating that notice is 2 weeks less than statutory requirements. The project is needed to upgrade tracks, cabling, overhead lines and signalling at Acton Grange junction. Direct services from Glasgow to Euston will be diverted via Manchester Piccadilly, extending journey times. Glasgow to Euston services via Birmingham will terminate at Preston, where passengers will board a bus to Crewe. The project is expected to cost £27 million.

All this unease has culminated in a call by the Rail Delivery Group (RDG), which represents the rail industry as a whole, to remove control of key aspects of rail delivery from Government and civil service control. The RDG represents the privately owned train operators as well as Network Rail, the state-controlled track, signalling and station company. It argues that control should be placed with an independent body, rather like the Strategic Rail Authority that was created at privatisation twenty years ago but was disbanded by the Blair government. The RDG are thought to have proposed an arm's-length body to counter Labour's demand for renationalisation.

That is more than enough for one month on the Not so Good News front and I have not mentioned the "n" word. A lot has happened on the nuclear power side in the past few weeks but I'll save that for next month.

BREXIT

Despite my claims about fake news, I can report that BREXIT STILL hasn't happened! We have lost a Prime Minister but that could have been because she authorized the visit by POTUS and his entire family. There is extensive coverage of BREXIT in the papers but they all refer to the macro economic implications rather than the immediate project related aspects. The main issue for the project world is the uncertainty which is causing delay in project approval and restricting expenditure on existing projects.

CLOSING REMARKS

Readers of the Washington Post may recollect an interesting story by Sarah Kaplan back in February. She was debating the length of a year. According to NASA, a year is 365.26 days but the US National Institute of Standards and Technology claim it is 365.242196 so she referred to the US Naval Observatory where the US master clock is housed. There she discovered it all depends on which year you are using. Now most of us use a standard year of 365 days +1 every fourth year. We all know about the Julian year and that is used mainly to define a light-year. Apparently, most calendars are set to the tropical year – surely in anticipation of global warming. Then there is the anomalistic year; is this when you have an unexplained error in your schedule? And last but not least there is the sidereal year, beloved of Isaac Asimov and Philip K Dick but too difficult for those challenged by basic maths.

Are you still with me? If so, consider the way pension claimants are losing out on payments. The Parliamentary Committee on Work and Pensions has been Universal Credit system. Their Chairman claimed it was because the Ministry couldn't count the number of days in a year. At about the time that Ms Kaplan was being troubled by a similar problem, Amber Rudd, Work and Pension Secretary agreed to look at how rent was calculated – perhaps she reads the Washington Post?

The Department pays 52 weeks rent on a monthly basis but some local councils charge on a weekly basis and there are 52.143 weeks in a year. So there is 0.143 weeks of rent missing. Now a Project Manager might resolve this by negotiation – how about we all work in months or all work in weeks? After all AI will cope with varying payments, won't it? The moral of this rambling tale is that your project schedule might be affected so be careful which time units you use. After all, do you know how many tropical days there are in a week?

About the Author



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Miles Shepherd is an executive editorial advisor and international correspondent for PM World Journal 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 and a Fellow 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@m-sp-ltd.co.uk.