

## UK Project Management Round Up<sup>1</sup>



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

### INTRODUCTION

It is now some six weeks since UK went into lockdown and in that time the best and the worst of the British character has come into focus. We have seen inspiring efforts from a wide range of people, ranging from small children to centenarians and from para-medicals through to senior medical staff as well as the many people who keep the supermarkets supplied with essential supplies and a host of other workers now recognised as essential – I hope we can all demonstrate our appreciation in due course.. In case you missed these, I will briefly mention some that I found particularly heart-warming a little later.

The project world has been affected by the pandemic with some projects being held back, others struggling on and a few suddenly appearing in response to the urgent needs of this country. All these will be mentioned in this report.

I mentioned last month that here in UK, we had the great benefit that BREXIT has been pushed off the front pages but it is slowly coming back into our consciousness, if only via minor comments about lack of progress from negotiators with no wider responsibility than narrow trade interests. Is anyone surprised at that, given the scale of other matters occupying governments around the world? I do wonder, though, whether this a sign that we are returning to some form of normality.

For many in the project world, it is difficult to remember BTV (Before the Virus) but most people seem to have established their routines, tedious as some are finding them. It is clear that many people are refusing to abide by the rules which is likely to prolong the need for lockdown.

This month we look at some BTV projects that have been reported despite the dominance of lockdown reportage in the media; rail seems to have been prominent while there have been some emergency projects to examine. The strategic implications of COVID-19 will undoubtedly affect the project world so there is a review of some possibilities

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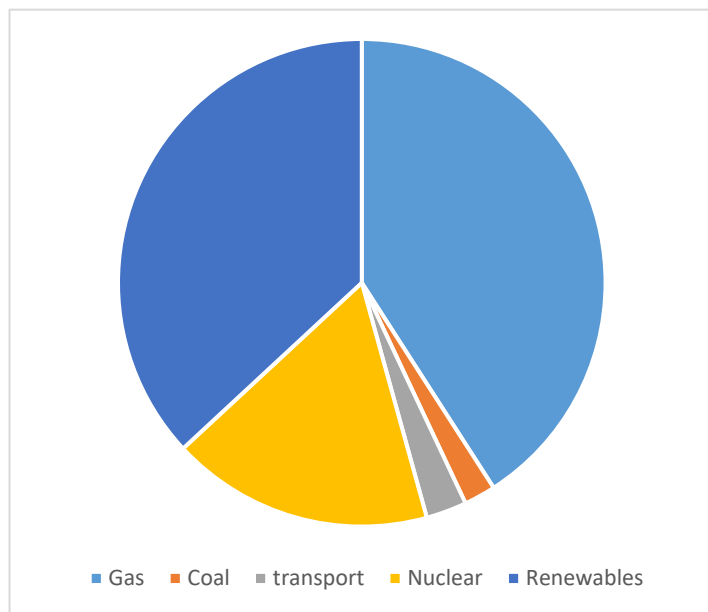
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## CLIMATE CHANGE

It is interesting to see how many postings on social media highlight the impact of lockdown on the environment. Levels of smog and greenhouse gases have fallen dramatically, not just in UK but all over the world. Similarly, sea areas around places like Venice have become clean and the waters of some of India’s most polluted rivers are drinkable once more. It is remarkable that people still cannot see the damage we do to the environment and just how we can shift the balance. I wonder how long such improvements will last once life returns to some semblance of normality. UK campaigners will also be cheered to learn that an official report has found that of the UK carbon footprint, half originates from goods manufactured overseas but the reduction in use of non-renewable fuels is offset by our imports.

Despite the mixed messages on the environment, it is encouraging to see that wind farms are providing a large and increasing proportion of UK energy. Annual greenhouse gas emission fell by their largest amount in 3 years as output from wind farms output grew to a record high. This 3.6% reduction is the 7<sup>th</sup> successive year of declining emissions. Annual declines over the last 4 years are:

Year	Fall
2019	3.7%
2018	2.1%
2017	2.4%
2016	5.1%



**UK Sources of Energy**

All this improvement in the UK climate leads on to an improvement in conditions for our fauna. The latest project by Butterfly Conservation reports the results of their annual census with several species showing substantial increases. Tom Brereton, associate director of monitoring and research at Butterfly Conservation, said: “The results from the 2019 season are really encouraging and provide evidence that the overall rate of decline of butterflies is slowing and for some species being reversed. Reasons for this include positive conservation through agri-environment schemes, increased woodland cover, climate warming, increases in grazing levels by wild animals and a slowing in the rate of agricultural intensification.”

Another long-term project is bearing the fruits of its labours. In 1979, a small number of wild cranes returned to Norfolk. Conservation groups have been working together to encourage the species, In 2010, the **Great Crane Project** reintroduced birds to the Somerset Levels. Similar projects were launched in Scotland and Wales in 2012 and 2016 respectively. The conservation project has yielded impressive results, with as

many as 47 of the 56 pairs attempting to breed, raising a total of 26 chicks in England alone last year.



Common Cranes – highest recorded population in 400 years.  
Image: RSPB and Nick Upton

## **BTV PROJECTS**

### **Stonehenge**

Large projects like the A303 Amesbury to Berwick Down are classified as nationally significant infrastructure projects, which means that a Development Consent Order (or DCO) is needed for permission to build. The six-month public inquiry ended on 2 October 2019. The inspectors issued their Recommendation Report to the Secretary of State for Transport on 2 January 2020 who was required to issue a decision by 2 April 2020, post it on the Department's website the along with the Inspectors' report.

Well, 2 April came and went but we had no decision but there were reasons – first, Parliament has been on its hols so couldn't do any work and also the virus has distracted attention and now, to quote the Infrastructure Planning Inspectorate website, "*A Statement has been laid in Parliament setting a new deadline of 17 July 2020 to enable further work to be carried out before the application is determined by the Secretary of State*".



Aerial photo showing techniques used. Photo – Times Newspapers

There is news, though – ancient crafts people used woodworking techniques in the construction of the Henge! Clearly as this was the Stone age, they translated this to stone. Also, we learn that these techniques have been copied by a modern company – Lego, who apparently responded “Ah, where it all began!!”

This reminds me that archaeology on Salisbury Plain is not just the preserve of academics. I should know as I spent many a happy winter’s night digging in

on defence positions during my training. The military still dig on the Plain but some are transferring their skills as a means of improving mental health. Skills such as reading the contours of the landscape, putting yourself in the mindset of an invisible enemy and teaming up to dig in under harsh conditions are skills familiar to generations of soldiers and these have been utilised in *Operation Nightingale*, as the on-going project is named. The operation offers serving personnel the chance to take part in an excavation and began in 2001. It has since focused on opportunities for veterans. This involves digs on MoD land at important sites dating from the Neolithic age to the Second World War. It has been the subject of television programmes as well as technical studies on its usefulness in recovery programmes. The latest study reports, perhaps not surprisingly, that more research on this subject is needed.

Tales of digging bring to mind other projects, as in the construction world. Reports have surfaced concerning the Whaley Bridge Dam blaming the owners of the dam for apparently ignoring safety warnings. An independent report claims the Canal and River Trust (CRT), owners of the dam in the Peak District, According to press reports, an engineer’s



Whaley Bridge Dam – August 2019. Photo: DANNY LAWSON

report in 2018 rated the dam as Grade D. Grade D is classed as “poor” with “structurally significant defects leading to loss of stability” generally in five to 10 years.

This poses problems for CRT as the report can be read to mean that no work is needed urgently. However, other reports indicate an 18-month time frame for urgent work, which was not carried out. From a project management perspective, the issue revolves around benefits management. A proper analysis would show the need to establish requirements beyond the end of the construction phase, which in this case



was decades ago. CRT took over ownership and maintenance responsibilities comparatively recently.

## OTHER PROJECTS

Despite all the distractions of the coronavirus situation, High Speed 2 (HS 2) still manages to hit the headlines. A Notice to Proceed was issued on 15 April which allows work to begin on the first phase, between London and Birmingham via the Chilterns.

Ministers have said publicly that the first phase of the £106 billion programme represents poor value for money. This has also been acknowledged in the updated business case for Europe's biggest infrastructure project. The report also said that it was "not possible to say" whether coronavirus would have a lasting impact on travel patterns that would further devalue the project. The important thing is that there is a Business Case and that there is some awareness of the major risks. Perhaps greater attention to challenging the assumptions of the case might have anticipated the £500 million VAT demand for design and construction work in the period 2014 and 2019 when the firm wrongly reclaimed VAT payments.

Post project reviews remain a sore point at Ofgem, the energy regulator. Italian contractor Prysmian handed over the Western Link marine cable to the National Grid. The project installed two cables running side by side along the length of the route which runs from Ayrshire to north Wales via a 239-mile subsea route to the Wirral peninsula and a 20-mile stretch underground. It is designed to carry 2.2 gigawatts of electricity, enough to power four million homes.

The project started more than a decade ago and was scheduled for operations to start in late 2015. Construction problems lead to a delayed start in 2017 when it launched at reduced capacity. It was made fully available only in December 2019. Since 2017, there have been six faults, taking it out of action for months at a time. The latest, in January this, was not repaired until February. The original contractor has booked €165 million in provisions for repair costs and "contractual penalties" since it handed the project to National Grid and Scottish Power late last year. Some lessons to be learned here?



## EMERGENCY PROJECTS

The growth area in the project world in the past few weeks has been the proliferation of emergency projects. These range from drug projects through Design and Build projects to construction. Somewhere in all this lie other less easy to categorise projects to support the supply chain and routine testing. All in all, a very hectic time for all concerned.

The most reported project was the construction of series of so-called “Nightingale” hospitals in England while Wales and Scotland had similar builds, they chose different names. The first of these was built in just nine days. The Excel conference centre in east London was transformed into a working hospital by members of the Armed Forces and NHS personnel. Clinical equipment including ventilators and rooms for 500 patients were provided initially with capacity for 3,500 more. Other Nightingale hospitals opened at Birmingham’s NEC and Manchester’s Central Complex; in Cardiff, Belfast, Newcastle, Bristol, Harrogate and Glasgow (the last not officially a Nightingale; the SNP have named it NHS Louisa Jordan after a Scottish nurse who served in the First World War). The encouraging post-implementation lesson is that with carefully used project management skills, emergency work can be done efficiently and at controlled cost. That these hospitals have yet to be tested clinically does not mean they are not needed but will be available for use when conditions require, probably in the recovery phase as coronavirus victims are moved out of main stream hospitals to free up ICU space for other types of treatment.

Equipment supply projects have been widely reported as everything from ventilators to personal protection equipment shortages have been addressed; some more successfully than others, it has to be said but urgent action was taken. As a result, innovative solutions have been found to repurpose existing designs and new equipment designed from first principles. Results have been spectacular with a consortium of Formula 1 teams designing a new type of ventilator in a matter of days and putting in place manufacturing lines to build the devices.



Staff at Southampton hospital using the hood.  
INDO/UNIVERSITY HOSPITAL SOUTHAMPTON/PA

The PerSo hood was developed by a team from the University of Southampton NIHR Southampton Biomedical Research Centre. The hood is better than a mask because it fits everybody and can be worn for long periods without having to be removed. The re-useable hood was designed in less than a week and passed tests days later.

The reusable kit should help resolve some of the supply issues linked to with disposable PPE.

Drug development is another area where many projects have emerged. It has proved difficult for the Government to assign priorities here are there are at least three areas for development: first, a reliable, simple and robust test is needed to identify coronavirus. Some form of finger prick test akin to a pregnancy test is needed. Second, drugs to treat the virus are urgently needed and third, a vaccination against the illness is needed to protect people in the future.

The problem with new drug development is the lead time for clinical trials, typically measured in years so repurposing existing drugs has been the favoured route and clinical trials are taking place around the world. As we close for press, reports are coming through about *Remdesivir*, an antiviral originally designed to combat ebola.

The drug has been shown to treat symptoms of coronavirus, cutting the number of days patients take to leave hospital by almost a third.

Vaccination drugs are also in the news with one of the front runners at Imperial College under **Prof Robin Shattock** and another at Oxford by the Jenner Institute and the Oxford Vaccine Group. The former is working on RNA vaccine and the Oxford vaccine is based on viral vector vaccines. Both entered clinical trials in April.

The UK plan, at least at the moment, is to have millions of doses of the Imperial College vaccine ready in advance, even before it is known whether it works or not. And if it doesn't, and that money is wasted, "That's not a big risk," Shattock says. Better a million useless vaccines than a useful vaccine we can't make. "Showing the vaccine works, and then not being able to produce it, is a much worse scenario."

## **CLOSING REMARKS**

It must be clear that the current situation highlights many lessons. Perhaps the first one is that it is Project Managers and Project staff who pull the chestnuts out of the fire – time and time again. While we can't claim to have led every initiative in the last 6 weeks, we have been central to successes and have minimised failure. This primary lesson will be lost if we do not ensure that key stakeholders know this. It is OUR duty to tell them and the best way to do that is via our professional associations.

Other, technical, lessons abound: the importance of risk-based planning, flexibility of thought in managing solution development and above all, stakeholder engagement. The constant whine from the media is about "lack of clarity". These incompetents seem unable to realise that it is not possible legislate for every eventuality. Seems some of our Civil Servants have the same problem.

Some would say that we lack resilience and from the number of calls to mental health helplines, it seems we need to work on this as a priority. Certainly, there will be changes to our way of life post virus even if effective treatment and vaccine become available. The benefits we have seen environmentally and the community spirit that has emerged need to be pursued and maintained.

For me, the two main lessons revolve around stakeholder engagement and numbers. The first picks up on resilience, education and building trust; all matters that Project Managers are well versed in. The second is something experienced PMs know – be very careful with reporting. Numbers can be made to tell many stories and it frequently needs an expert to decode the message. This means that we need to understand the assumptions, collection methods, and strength and weaknesses of the numbers used to brief senior management.

So as usual, PMs will pull us through the mess we are in. We must make sure we get the credit for our efforts.

## **AND FINALLY...**

One of the very good things to emerge from the lockdown is the upsurge of community spirit that has flooded the country. Most people have contributed one way or another to their community, but no one has caught the imagination so well as **Captain Tom Moore**. For those who missed it, Capt Tom achieved the record title for the most

money raised by charity walk (individual), raising a staggering total of £27,699,581 on *JustGiving* as of 21 April 2020. This has since risen to more than £28 million for the National Health Service and is still rising (just short of £30 million on his 100<sup>th</sup> Birthday). Tom, a WWII veteran from Marston Moretaine, Bedfordshire, had originally aimed to raise £1,000 for *NHS Charities Together*. He surpassed his original goal of £1,000 in a mere 24 hours.

The previous record was Can\$14.7 million (the equivalent of £5.4 million at the time and £27,201,900 today, adjusted for inflation) raised by Terry Fox (1958-81) of Canada, who, with a prosthetic leg, ran from St John's, Newfoundland to Thunder Bay, Ontario in 143 days in 1980, according to the Guinness Book of Records.



Captain Tom Moore with both of his Guinness World Records certificates / Credit: Emma Sohl - Capture the Light Photography

What is amazing is not that the total raised surpassed the previous recorded which had stood for 40 years but the fact that his birthday is 30 April – this made him 99 years and 359 days old when he set the record. Oh, and he also hit the No 1 spot on the charts with a joint recording with Michael Ball, making him the oldest person to achieve a No 1 hit. Was he a Project Manager?



## About the Author



### **Miles Shepherd**

Salisbury, UK



**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. He leads the British Standards Institute's committee on projects, programmes and portfolio management. Miles is based in Salisbury, England and can be contacted at [miles.shepherd@msp-ltd.co.uk](mailto:miles.shepherd@msp-ltd.co.uk).