

UK Project Management Round Up¹



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INTRODUCTION

It is now more than 100 days since UK began lockdown. We are still dominated by the coronavirus but life is slowly returning to something like “normal”. Whether we get to “new normal” is debatable but one thing is certain – “new normal” will become one of the words of 2020. This month I’d like to mention how the professional associations are doing, a brief mention of wildlife projects and a few snippets of project related news. Categorisation is difficult but I’ll end with the good news.

BAD NEWS

Reporting bad news about the UK nuclear industry is a little like shooting fish a barrel – not difficult but no fun! The latest reports concern the graphite bricks which surround the tubes that the control rods pass to moderate the reactor. These bricks deteriorate over time and those in the elderly reactors are getting close to their sell by date. This is nothing to be alarmed about as the condition is known and monitored in the 15 reactors on 11 sites. These reactors supply about 18% of UK’s electricity generating capacity and are being phased out. For example, Hinkley Point B has two reactors, the first of which closed down in February and the second shut down in early June. As the plant is scheduled for final shutdown in 2023, decisions on maintenance projects that would enable either or both reactors to restart will need to be taken – a straightforward cost benefit analysis one would hope.

However, such decisions are always complicated since ownership is shared with the French EDF owning 80% and Centrica the balance. EDF has suffered some pretty poor financial returns over the past few years and it is doubtful that they could afford the cost of projects needed to replace the aging graphite blocks. To complicate matters, the other Advanced Gas Reactors are likely to be suffering from similar problems which is one reason why they are being phased out in stages between 2023

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and 2030. The replacement reactors are not scheduled to start generating until 2025 at the earliest. Other reactors are also affected and Hunterston B in Scotland has had many delays to its repair programme.

This situation is monitored by the Office for Nuclear Regulation (ONR) who require proof that the control rods will operate effectively, even in the event of a major earthquake. According to Richard Bradfield, chief technical officer at ONR, such an event has never been known in UK and is described as a once in 10,000-year event. EDF have already spent over £200 million on test, inspections and modelling. This latter includes construction of quarter scale models to evaluate the safety case. Investment decisions are always difficult, in this case as Centrica has been trying to flog its 10% share and the intervention of the virus will have repercussions.

ASSOCIATION FOR PROJECT MANAGEMENT

APM has continued its traditional programme but made a number of adjustments to cope with lockdown and social distancing. The most notable change was the transfer of its conference programme to a two-week long set of webinars. These ran throughout June and members can access the recordings via the members area on their website.



Webinars have been a main plank in APM's offering for some time, and I did one myself last year. The usual programme has been supplemented by Lunchtime Webinars. These have attracted an interesting range of speakers from Specific Interest Groups and the Branches. Topics this month include: PM knowledge, AI for cost risk, sponsorship, the essence of successful programmes, Real world PM, and more. Details are available at <https://www.apm.org.uk/event/>.

APM have also responded to several important government initiatives in the past few weeks with **Debbie Dore**, CEO presenting the reaction to Prime Minister Johnson's "New Deal" spending plan and the Infrastructure and Projects Authority (IPA) procurement pipeline. IPA is the governmental body, reporting to the Cabinet Office and Treasury on matters such as procurement, project and programme monitoring, and risk assessments. Their National Infrastructure and Construction Pipeline 2020/21 was released last month (available at <https://bit.ly/2Y3c2Ou>) .



Image: NIC

Sir John Armit, (left) well known for his role on the London Olympics programme, shared his predictions on the post-coronavirus landscape. Sir John is an APM Hon Fellow and chair of the National Infrastructure Commission (NIC) and is planning for the changes he anticipates that he and other project professionals will need to shape.

APM launched their on-line development site, APM Learning, just as lockdown was starting and its launch was well timed. It offers a range of resources, including templates and tools as well as a glossary, the APM Body of Knowledge and a resource

library. Available to fee-paying members only, this looks set to become a highly popular addition to an already impressive website. A final note is the announcement of the Festival of Education and Research

PROJECT MANAGEMENT INSTITUTE UK CHAPTER



The UK Chapter of the Project Management Institute, in common with all membership organisations, has been affected by the coronavirus. As a result it has had to cancel all its face-to-face meetings. Some of these have been replaced by webinars including, this month, one on Leadership, another on DISC profiling, with others on data analytics and a Toastmasters event. This last event particularly appealed to me as I had images of project managers with their glasses raised (not spectacles!) which seems just the sort of thing we need in these troubled times. Alas, it turns out to be a praiseworthy event devoted to giving delegates the skills and confidence you need to effectively express yourself in any situation. Somehow, an on-line session does not quite have the same attraction. The full events list is available here <https://www.pmi.org.uk/events/webinars>. Live events are scheduled to re-start in September and details are here <https://www.pmi.org.uk/events/event-registration>.

CORONAVIRUS UPDATE

The national news is getting better slowly but progress varies across the 4 nations with Scotland and Northern Ireland reporting very few deaths and a much-reduced infection rate. Wales is also reporting very low rates but suffered a spike at a meat processing plant. England has by far the worst rates in UK with about 150 dying each day. The good news, though, is that the death rate is lower now than the 5-year average and some lockdown measures are being relaxed. The need to re-impose measures remains and have just been enforced in Leicester with some other northern cities also having raised levels of infection.



Image – Shulz

You can tell life is getting back to normal as our national sport has resumed. I don't mean football (soccer to US readers) although the professional leagues have started, I mean whingeing (speak to an Australian if you need this explained). Shulz summed it up well, as you can see! The news reports are now dominated by calls for more money for everyone, how poorly the Government responded to the crisis (but always moaners being wise after the event); complaints that some sectors of the community are hit harder than others (Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic; the disabled, hospital porters and many more). We even had a retired chief medical officer complaining that we didn't go into lockdown early enough – his evidence supports a view that casualties would have been 10s of thousands fewer! His credibility might have been greater had he said this in February or even better, January. As PMs we know that

good decision making is founded on good data. That was clearly lacking in the early days and there are still gaps in relevant data but we are getting there.

One personal whinge – have you noticed an increase in computing malware and scams? I seem to have at least double the number of junk emails, including 30% malware and any number of phishing attempts. So far, I have been lucky and not put my foot in the traps – I hope you are alert to these, too! So the news that fines for breaches of GDPR are rising sharply comes as no surprise.

GOOD NEWS

What amazes me is how well some people have responded to the crisis. We have had wonderful efforts from a large number of ordinary citizens, from front line medical staff through to rubbish collectors, supermarket workers and locally from our local Government who have done an excellent job in getting us through some pretty testing times. These people have responded wonderfully, and we should all be grateful to these often unsung heroes and heroines. It's not just these good people – we have seen some rejuvenated TV series, a new national radio station launched as the month started.

Rail is among the key infrastructure groups under the Government's "New Deal" proposals. Press speculation on reopening some of the many uneconomic lines shut down by Dr Beaching in the 1960s continues unabated but fails to take account of the FIST process for evaluation rail projects. Some businesses have rejigged their business model to keep trading and some, such as Novacyt, have even improved their trading positions (See press reports of their anticipation of events that resulted in setting up a new manufacturing plant and test solution).

CLOSING REMARKS

UK is still open for business despite all tales of doom and gloom. Entrepreneurs and Project Managers will lead the way in the recovery as Sir John Armit forecasts. The only cloud on the horizon is for the beaver project in Cornwall. News has just been released of damage to arctic regions caused by beavers. The boom in beaver populations is changing the shape of large areas with satellite images showing the critters moving into new areas and doing their terra-forming work. The dams act as heat reservoirs and cause soil to release greenhouse gases! Seriously, beaves can do good work so it comes as a shock to learn that large numbers of beaver have apparently been killed in Scotland. I was unaware that large numbers, reports claim up to 100, were killed last year on Tayside. What surprises is that there were so many overall. As Forrest Gump would no doubt have said, the project world is like a box of chocolates...

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 35 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 was a Director for PMI's Global Accreditation Centre and is immediate past Chair of the ISO committee developing new international standards for Project Management, Program/Portfolio Management and project governance. 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.