

UK Project Management Round Up



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INTRODUCTION

Well here we are, a month into the New Year, and I'm already reviewing my resolutions for the year. Many years ago, I made a resolution not to make any more New Year's Resolutions – and I have resolutely stuck to that ever since, so I can report that I have been successful for another year!

Less easy to address has been the Project World and what is going on in this newly independent post BREXIT state. The major topics from last year have not gone away so I'll mention them plus I have decided to include a new section to join the Good News, Bad News and Closing Remarks so you can expect something that reflects our new found freedom – International View.

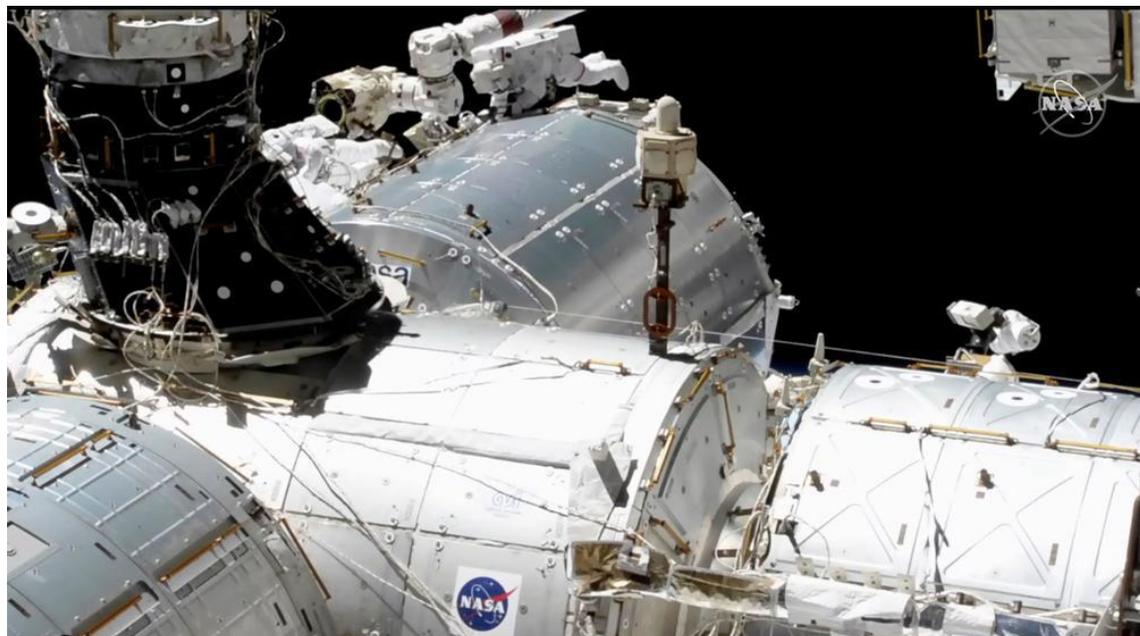
GOOD NEWS

The first bit of good news comes from the BREXIT camp – the sky has not fallen in on the country as soon as we left the European Union. True, there have been a few problems and I'll come back to those shortly but by and large, life has carried on much as normal.

New Research Institute. The second bit of good news is a £100 million to Oxford University by INEOS, the chemicals giant who also do a good line in sporting sponsorship. They fund a professional cycling team (think Chris Froome, Geraint Thomas) and their Americas Cup project under Sir Ben Ainslie. This donation is to establish a new research institute to deal with the most pressing of medical issues – resistance to antibiotics. It's been more than 25 years since the last "new" class of antibiotics has been introduced and many infections such as MRSA are resistant to the current crop. So this is a world class problem with as many as 1.5 people annually are affected – and they usually die. annually from strains of resistant bacteria. This will be a major programme and is scheduled to run for 5 years on this donation.

High Speed 2 (HS2) figures twice in the good news section. First, its archeologists have discovered one of the best preserved ornamental gardens at Coleshill Manor in Warwickshire. According to archaeologists, it dates from the 16th Century and has been compared to similar gardens at Hampton Court and Kenilworth Castle. Thought to have been commissioned by Sir Robert Digby, excavations by Wessex Archaeology discovered the manor house and large gardens, measuring 300m (984ft) from end to end, which date from the decades either side of 1600. Project Officer Stuart Pierson said it was a "once in a career opportunity" to work on it. "Evidence of expansive formal gardens of national significance and hints of connections to Elizabeth I and the [English] Civil War provide us with a fascinating insight into the importance of Coleshill and its surrounding landscape," he said.

COLKa is the Columbus KA-band Terminal, a British development to improve communications between the International Space Station (ISS) and scientists on Earth. Almost one year ago, the system was launched aboard the NG-13 Commercial Resupply Mission. Two NASA astronauts took part in a spacewalk in January in order to mount this British piece of technology on the International Space Station (ISS), marking the first significant technological contribution made by the United Kingdom to the spacecraft, it is also a marker for the UKSA long term strategy of collaboration and international contribution. Science Minister Amanda Solloway said: *"This mission to install pioneering UK-built technology in space exemplifies how government backing is helping our most innovative companies push the boundaries of what we can achieve in space as well as back home on Earth."*



COLKa installed after long in space work programme. Image: NASA

Designed, developed and integrated by MDA's UK division (MDA Space and Robotics Limited, Maxar Technologies) and funded by the UK Space Agency, European Space

Agency and the Canadian Space Agency. Additional contributions in the development of critical subsystems have also been made by Kongsberg Defence and Aerospace and Antwerp Space.

Proposed Route Extension. The other bit of good news (so long as you support the whole concept) is a plan being hatched to extend the new high speed network from its roughly Y shaped layout to an X configuration to take in Cardiff and Bristol. The idea was floated by not-for-profit company, Greengauge 21, who claim this could be achieved by electrifying existing lines rather than building new lines. This would increase the maximum speed from 125mph to 140mph. Using this approach, would allow HS2 to be extended to other parts of the north and Midlands such as Chesterfield, Derby and Nottingham. All this for just another £100 billion over 20 years.

Environmental Snippet. UK has made further important steps towards carbon neutrality as a report is published shown that more electricity was generated in 2020 by renewable sources than by fossil fuel. The Ember and Agora Energiewende report said that wind turbines, solar panels, hydro-electric plants and biomass plants together accounted for 42 per cent of electricity generated while fossil fuels — primarily comprising gas-fired power plants — which accounted for 41 per cent. The rest (17%) came from Nuclear plants. The previous year, renewables accounted for just 37%. Coal accounted for just 2% of electricity generated, compared with 40% in 2012. The impact of the pandemic on consumption has not been revealed which makes comparisons difficult but it is clearly a step in the right direction.



BAD NEWS

High Speed 2 features here in normal times so some may consider this a step towards “normality” while others just roll their eyes at yet more negative reporting. Whatev! While there are reports of outrage and disgust, including one couple who sold their home because of the programme now find the route may be cut back and the eastern link may not come anywhere near their old home. Other protests come from environmentalists complaining about emissions from the project that may, I repeat, MAY outweigh any benefits. And activist objectors claim they may be threatened with eviction.

The real issue is the business case, which for those who don't follow the minutiae of Europe's largest infrastructure project/programme, is predicated on passenger numbers. The problem now is that the pandemic has hit all travel in UK with rail travel particularly heavily hit. The long term impact on commuter travel and freight is

completely unknown and so any calculation of savings is purely speculative. So here is **Lesson #1** for this report, make sure your business plan supports a range of valid benefits.

To make matters worse, there are doubts about the viability of the 120-mile eastern section to Leeds via the East Midlands., Again, it is spiralling cost that is affecting the business case for this section. A report by the National Infrastructure Commission, a government advisory group, in December suggested that part of the route could be shelved, with funding instead spent on other projects, including upgrades of existing lines which clearly fits with Greengauge 21's proposals above.

This is a tricky issue as Our Illustrious Leader (aka Prime Minister – note I do not use the more usually abbreviation of PM, for what should be obvious reasons) has made all sorts of promises to “level up” inequalities in the North of the country, by which he means anything more than 50 miles north of London. This is **Lesson #2**, make sure your business plan factors in the full range of your long term aims. The transport secretary told MPs last month that updated plans for the railway in the north and Midlands, including the HS2 eastern leg, would be published “fairly shortly” but no-one knows how long “shortly”!

Oh, I nearly forgot, HS2 is besieged by tunnellers but not those currently digging away under the Chilterns. The latest sort are a bunch of over-privileged youths with eco-names like Laser (clearly a bright spark) and Blue which I thought was an Australian epithet of dubious meaning. It matters not for these daring individuals have burrowed under a small park in London in order to deter HS2 contractors from working. Their protest, in which they say their lives are threatened by lawful attempts to dislodge them, has caused other activists to protest that the first lot of activists are damaging the environment for voles, a small and endangered species. **Lesson #3** – make sure you review your stakeholder analysis regularly and adapt your engagement plans accordingly.

Defence Projects. This should really be filed under shooting fish in barrels but is still bad news. The National Audit Office has blasted “Defence Chiefs” over cost overruns on equipment procurement projects. Their specific point was that the plans sent in this year were unaffordable for the 4th year running. This seems a little unfair as there is a big difference between unaffordable and overspent, although there is a school of thought that says the civil service do not acknowledge this, despite their passage through the Säid Business School project leadership course (see next report). This leads us to **Lesson #4** – make sure your project sponsor understands the costs and benefits elements of your business plan.

PM Education. Regular readers will recall the reports that Säid Business School misled the Cabinet Office over the project management course it developed for their needs. The allegation of economy with the truth surfaced in an employment tribunal where a senior executive claimed she was sacked for claiming that the Major Project leadership Academy material was cut and pasted from existing Master's level courses. To the neutral observer, this seems a very odd claim since the basics of project

management are well documented in widely available Bodies of Knowledge (BOKs) and there are many advanced courses at universities in UK and abroad. It would be remarkable that any completely new content would be included in a new course. So it would be expected that existing material from an already well received Masters degree would underpin one for senior Mandarins. It seems that the Reading Employment Tribunal disagreed and that looks likely to cost the Business School between £3 and £4 million in damages for what was called a career ending dismissal.

BREXIT

There's no escape from this topic and things are becoming a little cleared although it is not straightforward to disentangle all the repercussions from the impact of the pandemic. The main issues seem to be to the supply chain as import of specialised items is held up by problems at the ports. This is especially disappointing as new regulations were supposed to be in place but as the final agreements were only made in December 2020, it is perhaps unsurprising. The bad news is that the Cabinet Office Minister, Michael Gove, told Parliament that some of the issues are not to do with lack of experience. We await developments...

Import issues are being felt in Northern Ireland where there some supermarket supplies are affected. However, what has really put the cat amongst the pigeons was the European Commission invoking Clause 16, which imposes customs checks on the Irish border, in attempts to divert supplies of COVID vaccines from UK to Europe. This prompted a major political row in which the EC was forced to back down. Although the immediate issue was resolved, it show the British public just what they feared, bullying attempts by Europe to interfere with the UK economy. This is a lesson that will not be forgotten in a hurry. The episode has rebounded on EU President Ursula von der Leyen who has been excoriated by European leaders already angered by the incompetent vaccine procurement which has slowed any roll out.

The other major aspect lies on the labour front where there has been a reduction in the numbers of skilled and unskilled workers coming into UK. During lockdown and in the winter, this is not having a major impact but there are longer term worries, particularly in the farming sector which relies on seasonal workers for harvesting. This is another issue where we await developments...

And finally, this month, we come to Eurostar, the high speed line that connects London with Paris, Brussels and Amsterdam (and several very attractive places in between). Not surprisingly, Eurostar has been badly hit by the downturn in passenger numbers that has resulted by various lockdowns, not just in UK but in Belgium and Netherlands. It reported a 95% drop in passenger numbers last year.



Image: Getty Images

A group of business leader has written to the Treasury and Department for Transport, urging "swift action to safeguard its future". According to the BBC which has seen the letter organised by London First, the authors claim that "If this viable business is allowed to fall between the cracks of support - neither an airline, nor a domestic railway - our recovery could be damaged...". Signed by 28 "leaders", including the vice-chancellor of Middlesex University, the chief executive of West End property company Shaftesbury, and the boss of the ExCeL conference centre, they point out that the company currently employs 1,200 people in the UK.

Eurostar is 55% owned by the French Government. Equitix, a major Canadian pension fund which has fingers in the pensions funds of organisations such as from Norfolk County Council and Marks & Spencer, own a major share after buying it for more than £3 billion in 2017. The UK Government sold off its share to the private sector in 2015. According to reports in the UK press, Eurostar is pleading for UK government loan guarantees to help it ride out the crisis. Ministers proved hard to convince and they insist that Eurostar shareholders, which include the French state exhaust their own funds first.

Pointing to the fact that the French government owned the majority stake, Grant Shapps, the Transport Minister has told the House of Commons Transport Committee that "It's not our company to rescue". Despite Equitix playing the UN Climate Change card, this was met with contempt. These calls for UK taxpayer cash seem unlikely to garner much support on this side of the Channel, especially after the aerticle 16 debacle. Nevertheless, Shapps said "It's primarily a French lead, but we'll be as helpful as possible. We're very, very keen for the Eurostar to survive, and we'll wait to see the plan [from state rail firm SNCF]". He also said that ministers were particularly concerned about protecting the 3,000 UK jobs dependent on the link.

INTERNATIONAL VIEW



Tribhuvan University Cricket Ground, Kathmandu.
Image: Wikipedia

As we close for press, I can bring you important news from across the pond! Well, not really, but the news is that the International Cricket Council has recognised that the US market is by far the largest untapped market for cricket expansion. Apparently there are more than 20 million cricket fans, no doubt many of Asian heritage, making up potentially the largest market in the world, after the Indian sub-continent.

The ICC plans for major tournaments from 2023 to 2031 have been hit by the pandemic, but

they have launched staging bids and USA Cricket in conjunction with Cricket West Indies are bidding for events including both the men's and women's World T20.

Cricket lovers will recall that the game has been played in USA since the early 16th C but now embraces some of the modern forms such as T20, a short form of the game. Those unfamiliar with this exciting form of the game can look up details here: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Twenty20>. USA is no stranger to this type of game as they participated in a tri-nation tournament in 2020 at Tribhuvan University International Cricket Stadium at Kirtipur, southwest of Kathmandu, Nepal. USA played Nepal, losing by 8 wickets, and twice lost to Oman in a one-off tournament at the start of February 2020.

Readers may recall our reports last year of a planned stadium in Texas. American Cricket Enterprises (ACE), which owns MLC, has secured a long-term lease on a vacant baseball stadium at Grand Prairie, west of Dallas. There plans afoot to bring cricket in various forms to USA with a Minor League starting this year and an expanded program in 2022 including a professional T20 league, involving six teams with five overseas stars each and drawing on the passion for the game in areas such as Los Angeles, New York, Chicago, Florida, Atlanta and Texas.– sounds exciting! This league has a host of key supporters including Kolkata Knight Riders, one of the major players in the Indian Premier League.

CLOSING REMARKS

Wildlife Projects

As I survey the sodden fields surrounding Schloss Schäfer, I reflect that the lockdown has not been entirely negative, and am tempted to say not negative at all; its just that the media keep telling us that we are miserable, our mental health is deteriorating and we are incapable of doing anything for ourselves. Clearly, that is not the case and the majority of the population are managing quite well, thank you for asking!



Image: spideridentifications.com

One sector that has brightened up many a locked down household is the wildlife industry where several projects have brought success and benefits to the people. First up is *Eresus sandaliatus* or for the non-Latin speakers, the Ladybird Spider. This little beauty is resident in Dorset, and until recently was thought to be extinct in UK. Luckily, a small colony was identified and the Back from the Brink project launched by Buglife. This project gathered up a

population and established them on a controlled site. They plan to establish at least six more. This will involve collecting and caring for spiders over winter, ready to release them onto new sites in the spring. They will monitor all populations and assess new sites carefully, maintaining the best habitat conditions for the spiders at all of its sites, and create more suitable habitat, to allow the populations to expand and spread naturally.

On the larger side we have two contenders, the great white egret and the common crane. I reported on the crane project in the autumn so will say no more here that the project has succeeded. Back in 1979, a small number of these 5 ft tall birds returned to Norfolk, on the east coast, In 2010, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) and the Wetlands and Wildlife Trust (WWT) launched a project that re-introduced more birds, hatched from eggs sourced in Germany. Originally released in Gloucestershire and Somerset, they have now spread to near-by Wiltshire and Dorset and are reported to be breeding in Shropshire and North Yorkshire.

The great white egret is a frequent, if not common, sight near Schloss Schäfer as we regularly saw Walter, a French born male that used to frequent our local reserve. He was not the only one as this past year there have been 5 birds, sadly Walter is not one of these.

Great white egrets are one of the rarer feathered visitors to the UK, and usually arrive in the UK in August ready for winter, which Walter had done since 2003. Walter used to spend six months at the reserve which is managed by the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust. A similar size to a heron, the great white egret was close to extinction in Europe a few decades ago, with around 35 spending their winter in the UK.

Reasons for the local increase are not known. Despite requests for interview, the birds have declined to comment.

A Final Entrepreneurial Comment

As we all know, it is an ill wind that blows no good and in these locked down times, it is heart warming to record that an enterprising farmer in Rossendale, in the wilder part of Lancashire, has played her part in keeping the country moving. For just £5 good British pounds, you can add a goat to your Zoom call. Available for 10 minute slots (go to [www. https://www.cronkshawfoldfarm.co.uk/goatsonzoom](https://www.cronkshawfoldfarm.co.uk/goatsonzoom)) and you can engage with Elizabeth who has impeccable video call etiquette, Terrance who has a deep interest in what you have to say, Lisa who lacks any form of patience or Mary the parent of these goats. Norris, though, has been banned for inappropriate behaviour. These goats are certainly able to liven up a staid project review meeting!

Next month, we will review Lessons Learned on these pages. Until then, stay safe!

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. His consulting work has taken him to Japan, Taiwan, USA and Russia. Past Chair and Fellow of the Association for Project Management (APM), Miles is also past president, chair and a Fellow of the International Project Management Association (IPMA). He was, for seven years, 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 is currently Chairman of the British Standards Institute project management committee. 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.