

UK Project Management Round Up



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INTRODUCTION

Well, here we are, another month into the battle against the Coronavirus. The news looks a little more positive than last month. It is still not clear that the light we think we see in the tunnel is not a train approaching but we live in hope that progress is being made. Quite a lot has been happening in the project world in UK and I bring you news of happenings in the professional Project Management (PM) society domain, the latest position in the fight against the Virus and some developments in projects in the infrastructure projects.

PROFESSIONAL NEWS

House of PMO – readers of our news section will already be aware of the arrival of another PM association, this one centred on the PMO. It is not clear to me what the P stands for – project, programme or portfolio (or all three) but the aim is *to create a home for PMO professionals where they can develop themselves, support the development of others and contribute to the development of the PMO profession*. This development is not too surprising since in the emergence of professions, there is always a tendency for the occupation to split into smaller units or contributing sub-disciplines. It is interesting in that there is a group that feels it is separate from mainstream PM. House of PMO has hit the ground running and have launched a Competence Framework and a linked set of qualifications that recognises 4 levels within the occupation – administrators, analysts, managers and directors. These qualifications are offered in a phased launch between May and November.

APM News – like all professional societies, APM makes extensive use of volunteers. As might be expected, this extends from the development and promotion of project and programme management as a discipline as well as event management, publications and product development. It is pleasing to see that APM have achieved Investing in Volunteers (iV), a standard similar to Investors in People. iV aims to improve the quality of the volunteering experience for all volunteers and for organisations to acknowledge the enormous contribution made by their volunteers. iV

is managed by the UK Volunteering Forum and delivered by the National Council for Volunteer Organisations, Volunteer Scotland, Volunteer Now in Northern Ireland and Wales Council for Voluntary Action. This is APM's third accreditation against the standard.



Debbie Dore – APM CEO

More surprising is the announcement at the end of February that **Debbie Dore**, APM's CEO for the past 3 years is stepping down. No reasons have been given and no doubt there will be much speculation over just why she is departing. According to their website announcement, she has provided excellent leadership during the very challenging times of the coronavirus crisis. APM has achieved a great deal under her tenure and in particular she has strengthened APM's strategic outlook, and working strenuously to raise APM's public profile. She was the Board's unanimous choice to succeed Sara Drake when she stepped up from her previous role

as Chief Operations Officer in May 2019 at a time when work to meet the changes required by the achievement of the Royal Charter needed a firm hand to complete. APM hope to have an appointment by the time Debbie departs in May. She has been a great friend to PM in general and APM in particular: she will be much missed.

Sir Bob Reid is an unfamiliar name to many of the younger set of APM members but those of us with longer memories will recall with great affection his time as APM President (1995 – 2000). He had a distinguished business career, Chief Executive of Shell, Chairman of the International Petroleum Exchange, Deputy Governor of the Bank of Scotland, chief Executive of Sears and Chancellor of Robert Gordon University. He brought much appreciated organisational expertise to bear at a critical stage in APM development. Thus, it is particularly pleasing to note that Sir Bob has been reflecting on his long and varied career in a new book entitled *No Condition is Permanent: Risk, Adventure and Return – The Business of Life*. He chronicles his early years and his career, including the many challenges he faced as a leader in turbulent political and economic environments.



Sir Bob Reid, APM Past President

"I saw so many difficult political situations," he explained. "My memories of Nigeria, or Thailand – where I was during the Vietnam war – are very much alive, which helped with the writing."

Sir Bob first became involved with APM in the 1980s as he was developing the Management Charter Initiative at Shell UK, to enhance the professionalism of the

organisation's management: *"We wanted to make sure that people carrying out these projects understood how they fit into the organisation as a whole."*

When asked what he hoped project professionals would take from the book, he said: *"I hope it will encourage project managers to think about their political contexts. Setting their projects in a political context will, at the minimum, allow them to define the project's impact on the environment and to improve its public acceptability."*

He recalled: "We were trying to move the completion of the work programmes forward on an intellectual basis, putting the activity into the context of the organisation's objectives and creating the ownership of the project."

PANDEMIC UPDATE

Success of vaccination roll out

INFRASTRUCTURE AND ENERGY

The latest report by the **Public Accounts Committee** comes slightly late as it arrived just after we went to press. Nonetheless, it makes interesting reading. The full report, all 22 pages, can be downloaded from the website (<https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/4491/documents/45207/default/>).

Ignoring the self-congratulatory remarks in the Introduction, the conclusions and recommendations are brief, covering predictable points:

1. The importance of value for money (the current buzz in Westminster or wherever Members of Parliament work from);
2. Lack of transparency to Parliament (MPs don't understand the annual report by the Infrastructure and Projects Authority (IPA) and want something "more transparent");
3. Further improvements to IPA assurance role (despite the raft of improvements regularly reported, more is needed);
4. Scope for *"a more mature approach to setting and monitoring cost and schedule estimates by using ranges which narrow over time"* (this is novel and sounds like someone has been reading a PM book – or even attended the Säid Business School course);
5. The calibre and number of people in leadership positions in major projects is still not strong enough (PAC still does not understand the difference between leadership and management, nor does it understand span of control);
6. It is vital that Parliament's own major project, the Restoration and Renewal programme, is an exemplar of an open and transparent project which welcomes scrutiny (This is just what it certainly isn't, despite being one of the largest and most expensive projects on the national list).

The report is well constructed, with a headline point supported by a summary of their meaning and then recommended action, which mainly falls to HM Treasury, the Cabinet Office and IPA. Interesting and worth downloading.

Less welcome is the closure of the **Wylfa reactor project** on Anglesey. As reported on these pages last year, Hitachi pulled out of the £20 billion project. Horizon Nuclear Power dropped their request to approve plans including its design, blaming, according

to the BBC News website, UK government funding options. The Development Consent Order (DCO) process for major UK infrastructure projects such as Wylfa, has been under consideration since June 2018. A decision was due to be announced at the end of April following a series of requests by Horizon to extend the process while it held talks with other interested parties, mostly over funding. Project closure is expected to be completed by the end of this month.

While one door closes, another opens. Shearwater Energy has proposed a small nuclear reactor and wind farm which, it claims, could be built for "less than £8bn" and start generating carbon-neutral power by late 2027.



Artists Impression of hybrid site (Image courtesy Nusafe)

Shearwater is understood to be teaming up with NuScale, an American developer of small modular nuclear reactors (SMR). NuScale has US Department of energy funding after its selection in 2013 as the sole winner of the second round of the Department of Energy's (DOE) competitively-bid, \$226 million, five-year, financial assistance award to develop nuclear SMR technology, and subsequently in 2015, the DOE

awarded a \$16.6 million award to NuScale Power for the preparation of a combined Construction and Operating License Application (COLA) for NuScale's first customer, the Utah Associated Municipal Power Systems' (UAMPS) Carbon Free Power Project (CFPP). Work under this award continues.

Somewhat slower off the mark, **Rolls Royce** has announced a consortium to develop modular reactors and install them in former nuclear sites in Cumbria or in Wales. Ultimately, the company thinks it will build between 10 and 15 of the stations in the UK. The consortium looks to be very experienced in matters nuclear and includes Assystem, Atkins, BAM Nuttall, Jacobs, Laing O'Rourke, the National Nuclear Laboratory (NNL), the Nuclear AMRC, Rolls-Royce and



Artists Pression – SMR Site (Image: Rolls Royce)

and TWI. Rolls Royce has considerable experience in building small reactors from its involvement in the Trident programme. Time will clearly be a major factor as the costs associated with renewable energy provision have reduced drastically over the last few years. However, Our Illustrious Leader (OIL) announced a 10 point plan as recently as September 2020 for a green industrial revolution that greenlights the UK Small Modular Reactor programme. The £215 million investment into small modular reactors (SMR) will be delivered through the Low Cost Nuclear (LCN) programme from 2021 onwards, as part of UK Research and Innovation (UKRI).

Staying on the nuclear news front, there is further news of **delays at Hinkley C**. The start of electricity generation from Unit 1 is unlikely before June 2026, compared with end-2025 as initially announced in 2016. Delays due to the pandemic will also push up the cost of the project by £500 million (\$US684 million) to £23 billion.

High Speed 2 (HS2) is still in the news. The next stage in the project has been approved. As usual with UK planning laws, the process was tortuous. The Bill to enable work on Phase 2a, Birmingham to Crewe went before the House of Commons in July 2017 and had its third reading on 15 July 2019 before transferring to the House of Lords where the petitioning period ran from 17 July to 16 August, and a total of 35 petitions against the Bill were deposited. The Bill eventually received Royal Assent on 11 February 2021. Phase 2a will support 5000 jobs and the infrastructure will consist of:

- 17 viaducts
- 65 bridges
- 36 embankments
- 26 cuttings
- 1 maintenance base
- 2 tunnels

The results is a shaving of the existing journey time from 1 hour 30 minutes to just 56 minutes. That is, so long as Swampy and his chums remove themselves from the tunnels they have excavated in London in protest. You will be glad to know that Laser and Blue were removed along with 4 others, apparently including veteran splinter on the bannister of progress, Swampy a week or so ago. That leave a single activist underground, apparently. One never knows, though, these activists don't usually tell the truth.

COVID NEWS

Workplace Innovation has been affected by the pandemic and not in the way you might expect. We all know about new ways of working as most of us have been working from home (WFH). This has forced many companies to adopt new technology and new ways of working much earlier than they had planned. According to a report from the London School of Economics, companies innovated at a far greater pace during the spring last year than they had done before the pandemic hit.

Between March and July last year, digital technologies and new management practices changed in more than 60 % of businesses questioned. Almost half, 45 per cent, said that they had introduced new products or services during the period and about 38 per cent adopted new digital capabilities, the survey of 375 businesses, conducted with the CBI, found. The report also found that about 90% of companies that innovated during the coronavirus outbreak said that the changes would persist well into the future. About three quarters said that their innovations had already boosted profitability. The findings suggest that companies have been innovating at a much faster pace than they would have done otherwise although just this week the BBC reported that staff wanted a return to the office.

People are keen to return to the office because working from home has left many "fatigued", says a boss at Britain's biggest office and retail complex. **Howard Dawber**, head of strategy at Canary Wharf Group, said people will still want to divide time between the workplace and home. Staff said they are missing office and city-centre life, he told the BBC. The Canary Wharf financial complex, in London, has only about 6,000 people on site, against 100,000 pre-Covid.

Project Managers WFH are similarly down beat as a survey by APM shows. The survey found that the majority of project practitioners (70 %) feel their ability to do their jobs has been negatively affected by the impact of the pandemic, and that a quarter (26 %) of all live projects are currently behind schedule or on hold. Reasons given included:

- Balancing work with other responsibilities such as home schooling and caring for relatives – cited by 31 % of respondents;
- Difficulties in adapting to remote working – cited by 30 % of respondents;
- Important meetings and phone calls being cancelled for COVID-related reasons – cited by 30 % of respondents;
- Challenges of communicating with colleagues & stakeholders – cited by 29 % of respondents.

On the positive side, APM found, 67 % of respondents reported that their employer had introduced new initiatives during the pandemic to support staff mental health and wellbeing. These include schemes such as mental health first aiders, dedicated wellness days and increased flexible working.

It is a sad reflection of the times we live in when a local newspaper announces on its front page that there were no COVID related deaths for 2 days in succession but that was a headline on my local paper a week ago. **Numbers** are important in our profession, so let's look at the covid numbers. We all know what the PMO can do with numbers but there is some encouraging news about the virus in UK. The main point is the infamous R Number, or reproduction rate. At the peak of the second wave, this was between 1.3 and 1.6 but this has dropped back to 0.6 to 0.9 clearly showing a drop in the infection rate. In practice this means that we saw 21% fewer cases of COVID-19, and 22% fewer patients admitted to hospital.

The reduction in statistics comes about in part due to a tough lockdown but more to do with the success of the **vaccine roll out project**. The Press seem to think the success was unexpected, or spectacular; it was neither, it was the project planning and implementation that achieved the creditable numbers. Last week 4.25 million virus tests were carried out, including 731,000 on 25th February and 21 million vaccination, peaking at just over half a million in one day. This amounts to more than 30% of the UK population protected by a first dose. Furthermore, UK has contributed US\$ 734 million to the COVAX scheme. All this is hailed as a major triumph, and results speak louder than words, but in the end, it is all due to good project management and proper stakeholder engagement.

GOOD NEWS

At the end of February, the UK government announced its intention to fund a new research agency. Modelled on the US Department of Defence's DARPA, the Advanced Research and Invention Agency (ARIA) is intended to reward science and technology. The Advanced Research and Invention Agency (ARIA) will empower leading scientists to identify and fund potentially ground-breaking research, in an attempt to establish the UK as a global scientific leader. No date has been set for its launch but it is hoped it will be fully operational by 2022. The government is currently recruiting for a CEO and chair. It will be influenced by similar organisations that have already proved successful, such as ARPA and DARPA in the US, which were crucial to the foundation of the internet, and GPS. This is a commitment from OIL's 2019 election manifesto.

CLOSING REMARKS

The **international project** report for this month is news that plans to expand Charles de Gaulle airport by the construction of a fourth terminal have been scrapped. The French government denounced them as incompatible with the country's commitments to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Environment Minister, **Barbara Pompili**, said the planned expansion had to be rethought to take account of what she hopes will be the imminent arrival of "green planes" powered by hydrogen, or biofuels produced from substances including seaweed and rubbish. The announcement marks a reversal of France's air transport policy, and brings **President Macron** into line with Boris Johnson, who opposes the third runway at Heathrow.

Speaking of **green transport**, a report found its way to Castillo Pastora about trains powered by human waste and discarded food to be introduced on Britain's railway under plans to phase out dirty diesel engines. A "BioUltra" train capable of carrying 120 passengers is being developed as part of government-backed proposals to cut air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions. Powered by biomethane — a renewable gas made from organic waste — combined with a battery pack, the lightweight, low-cost train will run on conventional lines but cause less damage to tracks because of the light frame, cutting maintenance bills. The technology could also be retrofitted to some existing diesel trains. According to one commentator, serving passengers with a vindaloo (very hot curry) at the start of the journey could be the closest we get to perpetual motion!



Image: thetimes.co.uk

Finally, there is some really bad news on a project we thought was closed some 8,000 years ago. It seems that **Stonehenge is not really English!** Not that there was an England when it was constructed but according to an eminent archaeologist, a dismantled stone circle in west Wales might have been a "proto-Stonehenge", parts of which were transported to Wiltshire for the monument there. Excavations and

analysis of the site at Waun Mawn in the Preseli hills reveal that it may be the oldest

known stone circle in Britain, dating from about 3400BC, and was also one of the largest, with 30-50 standing stones.

According to archaeologists, the four stones left are similar in size and dimensions to the 43 bluestones remaining at Stonehenge, and they exactly match three of them in stone type: unspotted dolerite. The Welsh-origin bluestones are the smaller stones at Stonehenge and were brought to the site before the giant sarsen stones, which are thought to have originated from near Marlborough.

One of the Stonehenge bluestones has an unusual cross-section that matches a stone hole, or socket, at Waun Mawn, suggesting it may have originally stood there. Because so few stones remain at Waun Mawn, the archaeologists said it was possible that other stones there were of spotted dolerite, the stone type of most of the Stonehenge bluestones, which was also quarried around Waun Mawn.

As the sun sets over Castillo Pastora, I take solace from the snowdrops and early narcissus that are emerging into our Spring, hoping that you all stay safe in these troubled times.

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 40 years' experience on a variety of projects in UK, Eastern Europe, Russia and the Far East. 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 Honorary 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, 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.