

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



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### INTRODUCTION

This has been a very dispiriting month and there is little good news in the UK project world. We should still be in the Silly Season (see last month's report) with all the light-hearted action to report. Instead, we have had a very unexpected emergency project, poorly handled despite the best efforts of the British Armed Forces. This event is too raw for comment, so I won't – instead I've trawled the media and have news of project action from a UK space port, some wildlife projects, sporting programmes and a bit on film projects

Before we get into the meat of the action, I have a new term to add to the Project Lexicon. I came across a strange beast called a **Project Curator**. My Shorter Oxford Dictionary tells me that a curator is a keeper or custodian of a museum or other collection. An alternative definition identifies a curator as someone who selects acts to perform at a music festival. From these "classical" definitions, it is difficult to see how a curator fits into a project. So I turned to Wikipedia (I am a subscriber – more people should support this immensely useful site) and what do I find?

*Project role: A curator (from Latin: cura, meaning "to take care") is a manager or overseer. When working with cultural organizations, a curator is typically a "collections curator" or an "exhibitions curator", and has multifaceted tasks dependent on the particular institution and its mission.*

So now you know, if you see your project as a cultural organization, you certainly need a curator! And now, on with the news...

### SPACE PROJECTS

It never fails to amaze me that UK has a National Space Centre, complete with six galleries and located in Leicester, a co-located National Space Academy and, as

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<sup>1</sup> How to cite this work: Shepherd, M. (2021). UK Project Management Roundup, report, PM World Journal, Vol. X, Issue IX, September.

reported in last month's news, two potential Space Ports. However, on reflection, an industry that generates £13 Billion annually needs a strong infrastructure and education base so these facilities should come as no surprise.

The latest space news comes from Benbecula, a delightful small town I know well, on North Uist in the Outer Hebrides. The news is good – Spaceport 1 has launched a commercial rocket from the UK ahead of the planned opening of a spaceport. The rocket used High-Density Polyethylene (HDPE) for fuel.



Image: JeffHolmes/PA

Spaceport 1's site at Scolpaig, North Uist, is one of several proposed locations for licenced spaceports in the UK. In Scotland, these include Unst in Shetland, the A' Mhoine peninsula in Sutherland, Prestwick in South Ayrshire and Campbeltown in Argyll and Bute.

Spaceport 1 joined forces with East Anglian firm Gravitilab Aerospace Services to launch the flight test vehicle, named after Ada Lovelace, Countess Lovelace, daughter of the poet Lord Byron. Ada was a 19th century English mathematician

considered by many to be the world's first computer programmer. She is also the inspiration for the programming language used for real time platforms and secure computing.

Spaceport 1 is a consortium led by Comhairle nan Eilean Siar (Western Isles Council), which plans to open spaceport in the Western Isles at Scolpaig, North Uist in 2022, for commercial, sub-orbital space launches. Mark Roberts, Spaceport 1 programme director, said: "This is a historic moment for Spaceport 1, the Outer Hebrides, Scotland and the UK.

"Our unique partnership with Gravitilab allows us to improve our procedures and progress towards a viable spaceport in North Uist.

"It opens up not only a route to space for inclusive, enterprising ventures like Gravitilab, but also offers this remote area of Scotland a chance to build a thriving business, bringing much-needed quality jobs to this region."

There are also sites in Northern England competing for recognition as the UK Space Port. The field seems very crowded so this is an important milestone for Spaceport 1.

## **SUMMER PROJECTS**

The lock down has seen several wildlife projects where the wider population can participate. Two annual events are the Bee & Butterfly counts. These are citizen science projects to study threatened species. You may not have heard of them, but last year the Bee count attracted 23,000 participants who spotted more than 830,000 bees in the count period.



Bee populations continue to decline world-wide, and a national picture is needed to help inform science and government policy. The Great British Bee Count (GBBC) aims to provide an annual picture of national bee populations while also raising citizen awareness of bee diversity. The GBBC is organised by Friends of the Earth, Waitrose (supermarket chain for non-UK readers) and Buglife. This year, photography will play a big part with participants being encouraged to upload pictures of any bees they see.

The data collected is used by experts investigating the plight of bees and the steps needed to help them. More than 20 UK bee species are already extinct and about a quarter of the remaining 267 species are at risk.

The Big Butterfly Count (BBC) has a similar aim and uses similar collection methods. Participant, often children and families and sometimes organized by school and social groups, observe a small site such as a park bench, back garden, for a short period of time say 15 or 30 minutes. The sites are logged using a phone app and counts uploaded to a central site for analysis by specialists. There are similar annual counts for other species such as birds. They all provide large quantities of data for conservation purposes.

## **WILDLIFE PROJECTS**

Insects are not the only wildlife to come under scrutiny. In the avian world, there are several breeding projects to prevent the extinction of threatened species. These are usually reported nationally but are in fact international collaborations – birds migrate after all. Bird projects reported in the UK include Bearded Vulture rescue project in Spain. We don't see many vultures in UK but the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) supports Spanish efforts, drawing on their own experience with Great Bustards which we have been trying to re-introduce for more than 20 years, with limited success. Other programmes include White Tailed Eagles, currently native to Scotland but successfully introduced on the Isle of Wight two years ago, and this summer a similar release of 21 chicks from Norway took place in Munster, Ireland this summer. As reported earlier this year, Cranes are again breeding in England. Perhaps as well know are the breeding successes of Red Kites, White Storks and Ospreys which are establishing breeding colonies.



Great Bustard Image: © Marco Valentini

Despite all this good work, there are still setbacks, notably on some of the big shooting estates in Scotland where Harriers are regularly reported to have been poisoned, trapped or shot. Harriers are a protected species but there have been few prosecutions even when radio tagged birds disappear. Work continues and this year

some 84 chicks fledged from 24 nests. We have the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and United Utilities, which owns large tracks of moorland in the north of England where record numbers of Hen Harriers fledged to thank for much of this years success.

## **SPORTS PROJECTS**

Regular readers will recall that one of my enthusiasms is Cricket and its international spread. In recent year, we have seen several additions to the ranks of international cricket with perhaps the most surprising being Afghanistan, which is scheduled to play Australia, one of the great nations in the Cricket firmament, in November. Current BBC reports indicate that the series is still on, for the time being.

I was greatly impressed that Cricket continues to make progress in USA (as discussed in earlier reports) so it is with even more enthusiasm that I see not only a European Cricket Championship – ECC21 – scheduled for this month. The competition is a month-long national team tournament including representative sides from England and the Netherlands. Featuring almost 100 games in September and October, 15 national teams will contest the inaugural 2021 edition. The competition will be intense for the European Cricket Championship crown at the picturesque Cartama Cricket Oval, Malaga, Spain.



Organised by the European Cricket Network this prestigious new event has received official sanction by the International Cricket Council (ICC). So, we will see 15 National teams will be representing their country at the first edition of the ECC - England Amateurs (National County Cricketers Association representative team), Scotland 'A', Netherlands 'A', Italy, Germany, Austria, Norway, Romania, Spain, Sweden, Belgium, Hungary, Czech Republic, Portugal, Finland



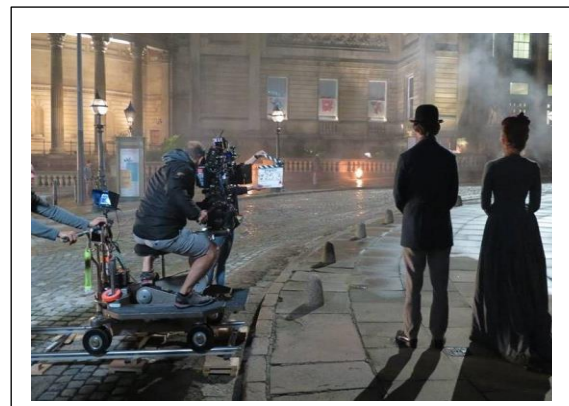
The Championships joins the well-established European Cricket League, now in its third edition. This was scheduled to be held from May 31 to June 25, 2021 in Spain. Event organizers kept the number of eligible teams to sixteen this year, out of which 15 are divided into 3 groups-of-five and one is qualified directly to the finals' week.

## Film Projects

Studio Projects Those of you who watch films like *Mission Impossible* franchise, *Bond* films and *Harry Potter* will know that they were made in UK studios, and frequently on UK locations. Similarly, high end TV series such as *Game of Thrones* (filmed in Northern Ireland) and the many series based on British characters are all filmed in UK. Last year, industry figures showed a £2.84 billion spend in the UK for film and high-end TV production, despite months of suspended filming due to Covid-19.

Production is clearly project related and serious money is involved. Inward investment and co-production spend on film and high-end TV in the UK reached £2.36 billion, which represents 83% of the entire production spend, underlining the UK's global reputation as the world-leading centre for film and TV production. Domestic UK films generated a spend of £119.5 million, which represents a 43% decrease from 2019

It therefore came as no surprise to see that there were two proposals this month for new film studios in UK. New film studios are planned in Liverpool as part of the waterfront regeneration surrounding Everton's new stadium, everything looks set for good times ahead.



The announcement that Sunset Studios is building an outpost in Broxbourne is the latest development in a UK production boom in which film-makers spent £3.6 billion on 300 film and television productions in the first half of this year. Liverpool is well known for its two cathedrals and now will be well known for two film studios as the Sunset Studios join The Depot Planning which has planning permission to build two 20,000 sq ft sound studios on land adjacent to the Littlewoods Building, which is being redeveloped into a centre for the film and TV industry. The purpose-built film and TV studios, or 'stages', off Edge Lane in Liverpool are separate to, but intended to support, the wider £54m Littlewoods scheme being undertaken by developer Capital & Centric.

There are other plans for new studio space at Marlow in Buckinghamshire, Farnborough in Hampshire and Shinfield in Berkshire. There are new developments in Dagenham and Enfield in Greater London and planned expansions at Pinewood, Buckinghamshire and Leavesden, Hertfordshire. There are also stages opening in Liverpool, Manchester and Newport.

*The Times* reports that giant private equity firm Blackstone and LA based Hudson Pacific Properties, owners of film and television production facilities, plan to launch a "centre for film, TV and digital production" in Broxbourne to take on the likes of Warner Bros. The £700 million investment is expected to create 4,500 jobs.

The Broxbourne site will be about 15 miles east of Warner Bros Studios where the *Harry Potter* series was made. Industry sources claim that the aim is to make it even bigger than Pinewood to the west of London, where the *James Bond* and *Star Wars* films were made.

### *New Productions*

As we closed came news that *The Lord of the Rings* production is, like Bilbo Baggins, going on an unexpected journey. It is leaving behind New Zealand's jagged mountains and moody lakes for the more gentle landscapes of Britain, where it began life more than 80 years ago. The tech giant Amazon has made the surprise decision to move production of its epic series, to the delight of the British film industry and the government.

Amazon is spending an estimated \$1 billion on the new six-series drama that centres on JRR Tolkien's fantasy world of Middle Earth. Tolkien set a series of books thousands of years before the events of *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy as part of developing a full "history of Middle Earth". The move is likely to further the UK's growing reputation as one of the most productive film-making areas in the world. Some £3.6 billion was spent in the UK on 300 film and TV productions in the first half of this year.

### **TRADITIONAL PROJECTS**

Much as it pains me to report it, we are not free of failed projects. First we have news of a £14.4 million IT project that was abandoned then comes the revelation that some £70 million spent on the temporary new home for our Members of Parliament has been written off.

The abandoned IT project, called Equip, was to provide software to improve its back-office systems. The project cost a total of £36.6 million of which £12.7 million came from Sussex police and Surrey police kicked in £9.5 million on the project. The software was purchased from the accountancy firm KPMG and is designed to support human resources and recruitment. According to a joint statement, all three forces said that it would save them "valuable time and money".

It is not clear whether any of the software will be taken on after Thames Valley pulled out. Press reports various say Surrey and Sussex could still use the software, but senior management "are considering a range of options" to see if it can be developed further. Former Thames Valley Police Commissioner, Anthony Stansfeld, is reported to have been "totally dissatisfied" with the progress of the project. He also claimed the system was "complex" and "not delivering what we want it to".

*The Times* noted this is not the first time that a police force has spent millions of pounds of public money on an unused IT system.

We also learned that our wonderful politicians cannot make up their minds about how to spend money. This comes as little surprise and many appear to be challenged to whistle and walk at the same time so no-one was surprised when the House of Commons wrote off £70 million of wasted work on a temporary chamber to rehouse

MPs. Nor were we surprised that uncertainty about the future of plans to refurbish parliament remains the dominant theme.

Never slow to complain, our elected and unelected representatives and their staff have muttered about sewage leaks, freezing temperatures (during the warmest winter for many years) and a damaged dispatch box over past months as hundreds of repair jobs have gone up to half a year without being resolved. They may not have noticed that COVID has caused a few problems with contractors. Staggeringly, The Times reports that the Commons annual report revealed that it wrote off £70.2 million of work on constructing a temporary chamber as a “constructive loss” amid “increased uncertainty” about restoration plans.

Quite why MPs think they need to vacate the Houses of Parliament to allow work to take place. Jacob Rees-Mogg, leader of the House of Commons, all but killed off that plan in Spring when he dismissed the idea as “fanciful” and insisted that the pandemic had shown that MPs could work remotely. I suppose we should be grateful they know that work is needed to “modify two cheese trolleys from Members Dining Room” and a complaint that the wheel of a House of Lords ice cream machine had fallen off. More seriously, a National Audit Office report last year said that it cost £2 million a week just to keep the buildings running. It is not clear whether this will improve should the refurbishment programme be implemented.

## **CLOSING REMARKS**

Well, we have some good news about the space port prospects, wildlife projects look encouraging and we are well down the road of taking action on vital pollinators. Similarly, the film industry is attracting serious investment and is likely to bring many new construction and production projects.

The not-so-good news about failed software development and the inability of Parliament to manage its decision making on enabling work for its mega project is disappointing.

Finally, we must salute of Japanese colleagues in their efforts to run the Paralympics in some very challenging circumstances. From what I have seen on TV, it has gone well and the athletes achievements never fail inspire me. Their cheerfulness, dedication and sheer guts should be an example to us all.

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## About the Author



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