

UK Project Management Round Up ¹



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INTRODUCTION

We are well into Autumn now and the bulk of what has been another difficult year for most of us is in the past. This month there is sad news, bad news and good news so let's start with the sad, work through the bad and end up with the good. We also reflect on the end of the sporting season with some notes on unexpected encounters.

SAD NEWS

Many of you will know of Professor Peter Morris either a groundbreaking academic or as an author and editor of several classic project related books. As you may have read in our Breaking News, Peter died after many years of fighting cancer and Parkinson's Disease. He was a man of many parts as you can read in our appreciation elsewhere. I felt his major contribution was to open the door to the recognition of project management as a profession by demonstrating the full range of roles performed, and their importance, thus taking us out of a minor technical niche and into the space where our contribution could be made in many different ways. He will be much missed, for his research insights, skills as an editor, breadth of learning, work in professional institutions and as an outstanding project manager.

BAD NEWS

One bit of bad news concerns the Ajax light tank. Regular readers may recollect reports that the armoured fighting vehicle (AFV) programme is in trouble. The programme provides a family of "complex, fully-digitised, land vehicle project delivering trans-formational change to the Army's armoured fleet; providing a step-change in capability to the British Army" according to the Ministry of Defence's bespoke trading entity Defence Equipment and Supplies (DE&S). The programme includes five other variants, named Ares, Athena, Atlas, Apollo and Argus covering

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roles ranging from troop carrying to recovery and command and control. It's main role is to support of the British Army's new Strike Brigades.



Ajax Scout variant

Image: General Dynamics UK

At about £5.5 billion, the Ajax programme is the biggest single order for armoured vehicle in over 20 years and involves some 4,100 jobs across more than 230 UK suppliers so it is important in many ways. However, the AFV variant has been plagued with problems and trials were halted in the summer as crews reported injuries due to excessive noise and vibration.

The Royal United Services Institute (RUSI) think tank claims the programme is now in crisis, with Ministers briefing that they had not been informed about the problems by senior military officers. This is the project manager's nightmare as here the sponsor is accused of not keeping the Board informed. The Times goes further claiming that Ministers believe they have been "*deceived*" on the extent of the problems... and are searching for those to blame, according to defence sources. An unnamed defence source is quoted as saying: "*Ministers now know that they have been deceived on Ajax and they fully intend to identify those responsible.*" Ministers are notorious for reading what they want to see rather than actually listen to bad news so there must be some doubt about whether they were appropriately briefed – think Emperor's New clothes. The other side of this particular coin is the likelihood of cancelling a major programme as part of the so-called "Integrated Review". No-one wants to be responsible for wrecking a major job creation programme – bad news however you look at it.

Hunts for scapegoats brings me neatly to another bit of bad news. UK readers will be familiar with the annual excuse for train delays – wrong leaves on the track (we do anticipate leaves on the track but only a particular type so if these leaves are replaced by other type, the clearing device is ineffective). I mention this as some rail travellers (remember travelling on a train?) have found whole trains missing, not because they have caught COVID but because they are affected by the weather. A railway line that has survived the onslaught of mighty storms has seen Class 800 and Class 385 trains built by Hitachi pulled out of service because, claims the Office of Rail and Road, the aluminium alloy used in the train body shells could corrode in weather "commonly encountered in the UK".



Image: Neil Slater via BBC

Initially some 180 trains were taken out of service but more than 90% are running again. Corrosion can also be caused during cold weather when salt products are used to manage snow and ice on the line. This story is not unalloyed “Bad News” as rail industry is developing a long-term programme of repairs. It is not known when the work will be completed or how much it will cost.

Real bad news comes from the IT industry where we learn that a major project is late and over budget (where have I heard this before?). The Home Office, responsible for policing in UK among other things, manages two police information and communication technology (ICT) systems: the Police National Computer (PNC) and the Police National Database (PND), which both need replacing. The Department’s programme to develop the National Law Enforcement Data Service (NLEDS) was launched in 2016 to replace both systems by 2020. Increasing costs, delays and significant police concerns that the programme was not meeting their expectations caused the Home Office to “reset” it in 2020. This sounds suspiciously like a modified version of the well-known Three Envelope Methodology and as expected, it has not worked. The NAO Report assesses progress in delivering the NLEDS programme by 2020 (Part One), the need for the 2020 reset of the programme (Part Two) and the way forward (Part Three). It is an interesting and informative read and can be found at <https://www.nao.org.uk/report/the-national-law-enforcement-data-programme/>.

GOOD NEWS

Small may be beautiful – if so, the small construction project at Silverstone may provide some beauty for Aston Martin, makers of sports cars for James Bond and a not too successful Formula 1 racing team. Small is a comparative word and so the new HQ for the racing team being built across the road from the Silverstone Race Circuit in Northamptonshire is not actually all that small at 37,000 square metres. It consolidates various premises owned by Aston Martin and is expected to improve efficiency.



James Bond’s Aston Martin DB5
Photo by Simon Clav, courtesy of RM Sotheby's

Owner Lawrence Stroll said. “It will fulfil my ambitions to be fighting for world championships.” The press release claims the project is Britain’s first all-new Formula One factory in Britain for 17 years. The last one to be built is McLaren Technology Centre in Woking, Surrey. Stroll claimed “It’s a brand new, state-of-the-art, fit-for-purpose campus.” This is a big money game, the project is estimated at £200 million – but the 007 car sold recently for a mere \$6.4 million and Stroll and Lord Bamford, the co-owners of both the car manufacturer and the separate Grand Prix team, are not short of the odd bob or two.

More good news comes from Salisbury Plain where a project has just been at Stonehenge. The monument was given to the nation by Cecil and Mary Chubb in 1918. The care and conservation of Stonehenge is an on-going programme and the most recent work has been to prevent cracking after routine laser scans found cracks in some horizontal lintels as well as surface damage to the stones. The project also replaced deteriorating concrete mortar used in the conservation project led in the late 1950s by Aubrey Bailey.



The 1953 work. Image: English Heritage

During Aubrey's conservation work, the 8 year old son of one the project team placed a halfpenny coin under one of the stones. English Heritage invited this man to replace the 1950s coin. Inflation has raised the value of the coin and the new one is a newly minted silver £2 coin commemorating Britannia.



Protector Drone
Image: RAF UK Crown Copyright

Not all MOD news is bad. The latest Remotely Piloted Aircraft System (RPAS to those on the inside or Drone to you and me) completed a critical test as it became the first RPAS to fly in normal airspace alongside commercial aircraft. The Protector is built on the same frame as the Reaper RPAS it replaces. The first three aircraft cost a cool £65 million but comes complete with three ground stations and ancillary equipment. The contract contains

options for a further 13 air vehicles and supporting equipment valued at around £180 million. Progress with the Protector test schedule follows a two-year delay imposed by the MoD in 2017 after the British ran into budget problems. According to Defense News, the delay was the main cause of a 40 % hike in Protector program costs, top MoD official **Stephen Lovegrove** said in a letter to the Parliamentary Public Accounts Committee published earlier this year. Protectors are multi-role aircraft. Primarily employed in Intelligence, Surveillance, Target Acquisition, and Reconnaissance (ISTAR) roles, it is also capable of missions above British towns and cities, including surveillance during flooding, to monitor migrants in the Channel or support search and

rescue operations. It has an endurance of about 40 hours and flies at around 240 mph.

Some good news for users of the Tube in London. Two new tube stations which make up the Northern Line Extension opened at Nine Elms and Battersea Power Station. This is apparently the first major tube extension this century, delivered for an estimated total cost of £1.1bn – £160m under budget – to not only improve connectivity to the areas but to provide jobs for over 25,000 people. I find this claim to job support hard to understand but no doubt the Value Management specialist will understand how it is achieved. There are now 272 tube stations – many Guinness Book of Records entries will need to be reclassified thus generating some small but gratifying projects!

While we are talking about 25,000 new jobs, mention must be made of report by the Council for the Preservation of Rural England (CPRE) which claims the same number of new jobs can be created by boosting hedgerows by 40% and further, that every £1 invested in this boost yield £4.



Hedgelaying. Image CPRE

According to CPRE, English hedgerows are in decline. **Claire Maymon**, a hedgelayer and trustee at the National Hedgelaying Society noted *“In a 2007 Countryside Survey, only 48% of hedgerows were in what we’d call a good structural condition, ‘and in some places, this figure was as low as 10%.’. It’s easy to forget these fixtures of our landscape are*

manmade, after all – and where hedgerows are failing, the skill of a hedgelayer can make all the difference.”

Energy supplies have been in the headlines this month with panic buying of petrol when a shortage of tanker drivers caused delivery problems for some petrol stations. More significant developments include the news that the Governor of the Bank of England says the Bank’s Prudential Regulations Committee is supporting the Government’s goals of reducing greenhouse gas emission to net zero by 2050. I doubt that I will be able to hold Mr Bailey to account for this but rust that younger readers will!

At the same time, we learn that Scotland is in pole position to drive economic growth in the transition to net zero emissions. New research by Lloyds Banking Group and Oxford Economics claims that at least £1.4 trillion is expected to be spent between 2020 and 2050 as part of the transition to a low-carbon economy. Up to 2.5 million jobs are forecast to be created over that time span in green industries and much of that will result in many projects. The researchers looked at measures including innovation, skills and infrastructure to rate each region and nation in the UK on its potential for growth. Scotland came out top – I will be checking on progress next month on my visit to the Highlands.

Two last snippets of good news – the River Thames is alive and there is talk of a promising new technology to capture CO₂. A live Thames is confirmed by a land and

air survey carried out by the Zoological Society of London (ZSI) estimates that there are 2,866 grey seals and 797 harbour seals population the River Thames. While these numbers are slightly lower than the last survey in 2019, this survey is thought to be more accurate. We also have reports of salmon and other sea species of fish in the estuary so the reports of the river being dead, in a report in 1957, seem to have been greatly exaggerated, to quote Mark Twain.

The CO₂ capture is not actually in UK but I wanted to acknowledge work by Icelandic colleagues who have devised a way of extracting the greenhouse gas and using it to produce other minerals. The plant, built by Climeworks, a Swiss company, and Icelandic firm Carbfix, can extract 4,000 tonnes of atmospheric CO₂ annually. The gas is collected in sponge-like filters which are then heated and stored underground. Apparently 90% of the gas so stored has turned to rock in two years. This important new technology should make serious inroads on greenhouse gas emissions. Initial costs are thought to be in the region of \$10 - \$15 million.

CLOSING REMARKS

On balance, we have had a good month with rather more good news than bad so I'll end by noting two developments in cricket. The first is a traditional match between the Royal Southern Yacht Club, Hamble, and Island Sailing Club, Isle of Wight. The former won the match held on the Brambles Bank a sand bank in the middle of the Solent that emerges once a year on the lowest tide. You had to be up early to see the game this year as conditions peaked at sunrise! *The Times* reports that inmates from Parkhurst Prison on the Isle of Wight were the first to play on Brambles Bank in the 1950s, with prison officers confident that they could not escape. The sailing clubs took over the tradition in 1984.

The second is the European Cricket Championships, held at the Cartama Oval, Cartama on the Spanish Costa del Sol. Some 15 teams from as far afield as Finland in the north to Spain in the south are taking part in a month long tournament. Teams are split into three groups for round robin games before the top two teams from each group will qualify to play in the Championship Week between October 4-8. Games are very short (10 overs each side) and players are mostly from India and Pakistan but cricket is getting great TV coverage which should help the game expand in Europe. In UK, we already benefit from some excellent players from the Netherlands and Denmark playing in the County games and we will hope to see more and from different countries in years to come. I'm off now to watch Finland play an England XI – I hope my colleague Jouko is able to watch, too!

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 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. 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 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.