

UK Project Management Round Up



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INTRODUCTION

Regular readers will know that the high summer in UK is characterized by minimal fresh news and sensationalist reporting of the few newsworthy events that do take place. This report is intended to show that the good folk of the Fifth Estate are just lazy and ill-informed as I bring to you news of some Bad News (again on the IT front), some news that could be either good or bad depending on your point of view and some definitely good news before rounding off with news of a major project completion in Croatia, a mention of a new outcome from a major UK project and a sinister development that may affect project managers. First, the Bad News.

BAD NEWS

Reporting problems with IT projects is a little like shooting fish in barrels but the reports this month do illustrate a PM Lesson (#6, following the report in this column in Jan 21). First is a poorly implemented system upgrade and then we have a system that won't allow an upgrade.

- **Upgrade Issue.** Back in February, Next, the fashion retailer, upgraded their Oracle Payroll system. The upgrade has been a major problem that has left a large number of the fashion retailer's 43,000-strong workforce underpaid over several months. At a time when the cost of living is skyrocketing, this has left low-paid staff struggling with reports of some having to rely on food banks. To add to the impact of the failed upgrade, there are reports that Next deducted some staff pension contributions without investing them into their retirement pots; no doubt this has now been resolved but it leaves Next with major reputational damage. This is in sharp contrast to their track record – they have been widely praised for coming through the retail crisis and the pandemic in good shape. The retailer reported pre-tax profits of £823 million last year, the highest in its 40-year history.
- **Legacy Failures.** I was horrified while doing my background checks on IT failures to see just how many and varied these are. Readers may recall previous reports

in these pages of major systems failure, often but not exclusively related to upgrades. Major failures at British Airways (2018 and continuing), TSB (2018) and the Post Office Counters disaster all point to an industry-wide problem. The problem with Bank IT systems was so acute in 2018 that the Treasury Select Committee (a group of Members of Parliament) demanded that banks be made to pay larger levies to regulators so that they can tackle the “unacceptables” number of IT failures in the financial services sector. Steve Baker, who led the Treasury committee at the time said “*For too long, financial institutions issue hollow words after their systems have failed, which is of no help to customers left cashless and cut off.*” The regulators have so far come up with no improvements or obvious action to prevent further disasters.

- **Lessons?** One common feature of these banking failures (and others, particularly the BA problems) seems to be that they occur in legacy systems or on handover to new systems. Legacy systems are notorious for the problems they present in terms of aging technology but the costs of developing new systems with up to date operating systems, extensive security and resilience requirements makes their development a major challenge both technically and financially. From a PM perspective, it seems unlikely that Agile approaches would be effective since limited change would meet regulatory requirements. Rolling several changes together and using a Waterfall approach seems to have similar limitations and would need greater testing. Is there a lesson here for Project Managers, I hear you ask? Methodologically, I doubt it but the obvious answer has to be to make sure there is adequate time for testing. **Lesson #6** avoid Big Bang change overs.

MIXED NEWS

- **Sizewell C.** If you are a fan of improving the National Energy resilience, news of nuclear progress will be welcome. There has been little news since the January announcement of £100 million and continuing support for the project. There have been major concerns about the viability of the project as the proposed developers, EDF, have had financial problems that resulted in a bail out by the French Government (see my report on nuclear finances last month) and it took Government intervention to achieve planning consent. So news that leaked out at the end of the month that Boris Johnson, Our Illustrious Leader (OIL) to avoid confusion between Project Manager and Prime Minister (PM), has apparently agreed to part fund the proposed construction of the Sizewell C. Press reports claim that, according to a senior government source, he and chancellor Nadhim Zahawi took a decision in principle several weeks ago — without telling other ministers! Clearly, these sources did not read my report last month in January that the Government had intervened in the planning approval (and now face legal challenges) or seen the Department for Business and Industry press release in January that the project to the tune of £100 million. *The Times* reports that OIL and Zahawi (the man with the money, better known as the Chancellor of the Exchequer) lame ducks both, are understood to see the new power station as vital to Britain’s future energy security and to want to make the announcement

themselves to burnish their legacies in office. As we will have a new Government by the time you read this, anything could happen!



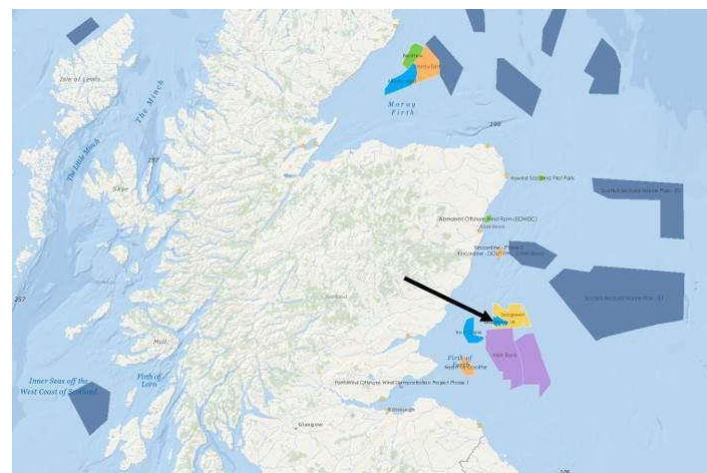
Sizewell C Artist's Impression

Image: EDF

As I said, whether this news strikes you as good or bad will depend on your personal perspective but many of us will regard it as possibly both.

➤ **Seagreen Project Progress.** And now for something that everyone should regard as GOOD NEWS from a project management perspective at least. The Seagreen wind farm, off the Scottish coast, has begun generating power.

The project, owned by the FTSE 100-listed energy giant Scottish and Southern Energy and France's Total, reported that the first turbine was connected to the grid early on Monday 23 August. Four were operating about 17 miles off the Angus coast in the North Sea, each capable of producing 10 megawatts. The project was planned back in 2010 and comprises 114 turbines in total, making it



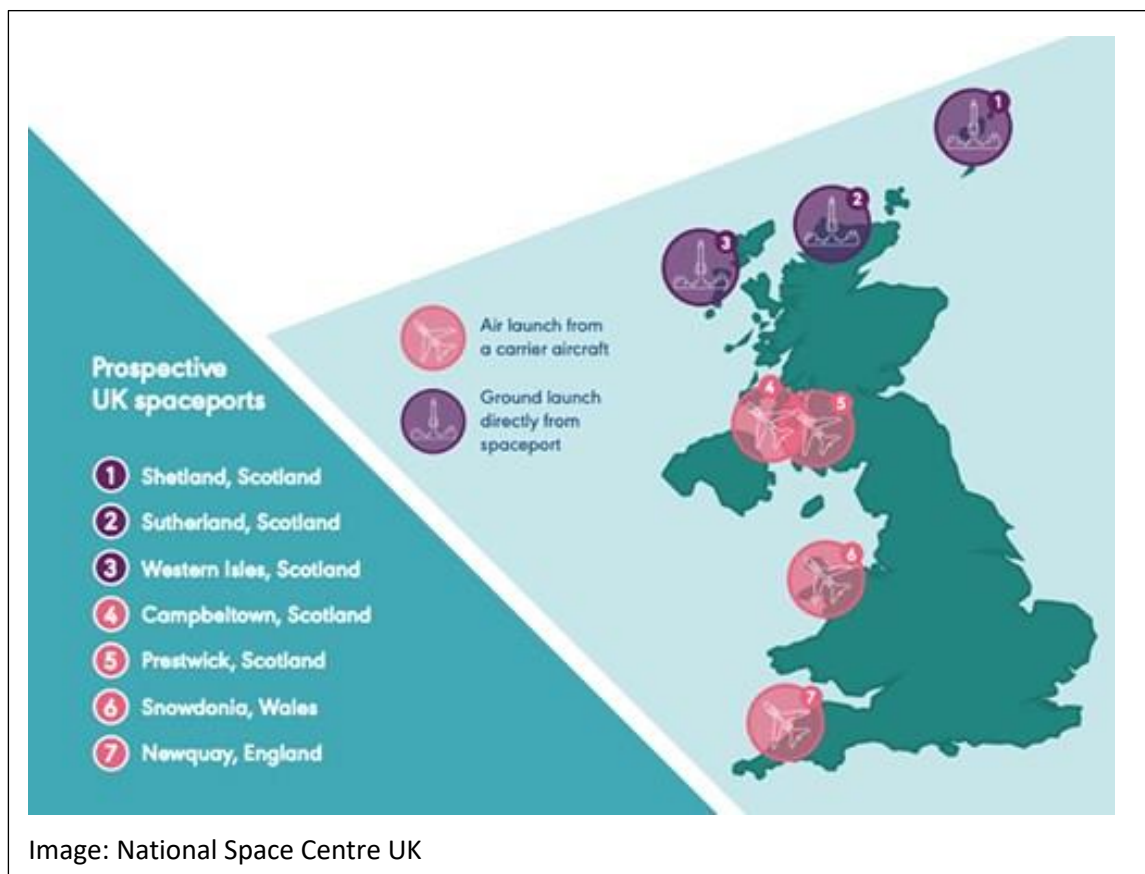
Seagreen 1A (arrowed) Other wind farms shaded Image: 4cOffshore interactive map

development Scotland's biggest offshore wind farm. Forty turbines have been installed so far. Total capacity will be almost 1.1 gigawatts.

- The project has not had an easy rider as the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) objected but this was rejected in 2017. Other objections came from local fishermen but the Angus Council raised no objections. SSE's Lead Consent Manager Heather Donald, said at the time: "The revised Seagreen Offshore Wind Farm plans represent one of the largest construction opportunities in the UK and it is welcome news that Angus Council has raised no objection to the project." The construction faced major technical challenges as it is the world's deepest fixed-bottom wind farm, anchored 59m (193ft) deep. While the contribution renewables make to the reduction of greenhouse gases, wind generation has still not overcome the problems presented by both excessive wind strength and lack of wind.

GOOD NEWS

- **UK Spaceport Update.** As can be seen from the image below, UK boasts seven possible spaceports, covering traditional ground launch and air launch capabilities.



The Cornish site plans to launch a satellite that will track ships to combat terrorism, smuggling and piracy. A modified Boeing 747-400 named Cosmic Girl is due to take off from Cornwall Airport (#7 on the map above) with a Virgin Orbit rocket attached under one wing. This launch is expected later this year, currently scheduled for October, but no date has been released. However, the Virgin Orbit

launch vehicle which is expected to act in the first UK launch, received AS 9100 certification from the Performance Review Institute following a successful launch of 33 satellites in August.

- Meanwhile in Scotland, plans are afoot to provide a flexible launch system that can make use of any of its 5 planned spaceports. Edinburgh based Skyrora, a space start-up that started designing its first rocket some 5 years ago. However, it had no launch site, so came up with the idea of a spaceport in a box. This novel concept is actually up to a dozen boxes. Standard shipping containers are employed, one holding the 22.7 metre XL rocket, another packs the command centre, another holds the power centre, and another contains the fuelling equipment.



Launch Unit. Image courtesy Skyrora

Skyrora's unique selling point is not price but flexibility. Using container based units, satellites can be launched from almost anywhere. Costs do not compare with those offered by companies such as Elon Musk's SpaceX but potential users would not need to wait for a launch opportunity to piggyback on with all the limitations that implies.

Satellite launches are a rapidly growing business with the expectation that there could be more than 100,000 flying around Earth by 2030, according to the Satellite Industry Association. That will require a lot of launches. Not only the convenience of more direct control over timing and location of launches that will be attractive to clients, but there is also the possibility of rapid response to loss of satellites and is likely to appeal to military clients. The Shetland location for Skyrora's launch will be the new SaxaVord spaceport on Unst (#1 on the map above), which is hoping to launch 16 rockets a year by 2030. The UK Space Agency aims to capture a 10 per cent share of the global space market, which is projected to be worth £490 billion a year by 2030.

Skyrora submitted its application to the UK Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) to obtain the necessary licence for commercial spaceflight activities to allow Skyrora to undertake planned orbital launches in 2023, enabling the company to provide its technologies commercially and provide the UK with a competitive edge in the growing New Space industry.

- **Medical Projects.** There are many projects in the medical world but they seldom make the headlines. That changed during the National Lockdowns when we all avidly followed the work of researchers and their project managers as vaccines were first developed and then rolled out. Another critical medical project found a way to alter blood types in donor kidneys. The process involved employed a device usually used to pass oxygenated blood through a donated kidney to preserve it. This time it was used to supply the organ with blood that contained a special enzyme. This removed molecules that lined the blood vessels of the kidneys, which led to the organs being converted to Type O. This is important since people with blood types A and B, less common than Type O can only accept their own blood type and Type O so concerting donated organs to Type O could allow any donated organ to be transplanted into any patient. This would have a major impact on transplant rates. The next steps will involve testing that the modified kidneys work in the laboratory before human trials. *The Times* reports that the British team were inspired by a group in Canada, who used a similar technique to change the blood type of donated lungs. The Canadians say that human trials could take place next year.

➤ **Natural World Projects.**

Bisons to Britain. Last seen in Britain shortly after the end of the last Ice Age, the bison has been re-introduced to a wood in southern England. Formally called *Bison bonasus*, the European bison is the continent's largest land mammal, weighing in up



Image: cultura/Corbis

to a tonne. The breed was essentially extinct by 1927, after depredation by poachers, with only 54 individuals survived in European Zoos. Since then there have been re-introductions to forests in Belarus, Poland, Russia, Lithuania, the Ukraine, Romania and Slovakia.

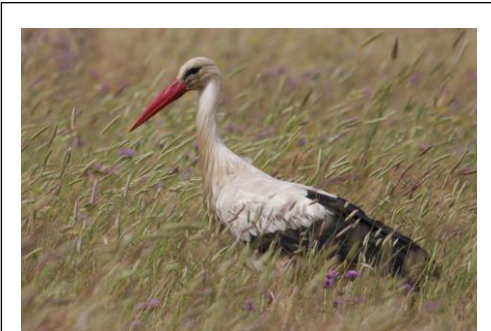
There have already been successful breeding programmes in several UK and European countries and the breed, while still not fully re-established, its status is

robust enough to allow release. Some have taken place in other European countries, for example in Romania, Poland and in the Netherlands, where people are reportedly able to walk through areas where bison are present without problems if a respectful distance is kept.

The initial release at West Blean and Thornden Woods, a Kent Wildlife Trust reserve, consisted of a mature female and two younger female bison took place in July. They were joined in August by a bull with the hope that the first calves will be born next year and that the herd could eventually grow to be 20 strong.

Bison are regarded by the rewilding fraternity as ‘ecosystem engineers’, in much the same way as beavers. This small herd has had an immediate impact on the reserve as they created a clearing for themselves. **Donovan Wright**, a ranger at the site, said the beasts ate up to 35kg of vegetation a day and created a large amount of dung. *“With that comes lots of fertilising and seed dispersal,”* Wright said. *“The birds have figured out that bison droppings attract invertebrates. They have been pecking at the bison dung, feasting off insects.”*

The Politics of Rewilding. There are a large number of so called rewilding schemes in UK. I reported last year on efforts at Wild Ken Fen in Norfolk where beavers have



White Stork image: Bruno H. Martins

been successfully released and the Isle of Wight where White Tailed Eagles have been released in 2019. Scotland has seen their eagle population expand, too. As recently as May I saw a White Stork in Somerset and there have been a long running reintroduction programme there for Great Cranes.

Despite widespread recognition of the good intent of these schemes, there is a counter argument about land use. According to **Tony Juniper**, head of the government’s nature agency since 2019, *“There has been a polarisation in the debate between those who produce food and those who advocate rewilding,”* he said. *“People [are] talking about rewilding as the alternative to farming. It’s presented as a binary choice, which isn’t quite right.”* Juniper argues persuasively that *“We need to get many more things out of our land than just food,”* he said. *“We need to have healthy land to replenish aquifers and to have clean rivers. We need to have the land in a state whereby it’s going to help us be resilient to climate-change impacts. And then, on top of that, there’s demand for recreation, there’s demand for infrastructure, demand for industry and, of course, housing. I don’t think it’s particularly helpful to trade any two of these off against each other.”*

Against this background comes the news that a plan to release 60 Sea Eagles at Wild Ken Hill has been abandoned after objections from local landowners. The National History Museum reported that the cancellation of the project is reminiscent of earlier attempts just over a decade ago, when plans to reintroduce the birds to the same site were called off in 2009 following the previous year’s financial crisis. Livestock farming in the East of England is not so precarious as it is in the Outer Isles but the cause has not been helped by objections there by Scottish Members of Parliament (see last

month's report). A difficult and emotional situation, one that we as PMs regularly encounter.

CLOSING REMARKS

It is hard to tell where the next item sits on the spectrum of Good and Bad News. I guess it all depends on how you view the largest infrastructure project in Europe (also known as Crossrail). Anyway, the news is that Engineers from Crossrail International, the advisory company wholly owned by the Department for Transport, will provide consulting services for a new \$45 billion, three-line underground with 90 miles of tracks and 109 stations for the Tel Aviv metro.

Less complex is the news from last of the opening of the Peljesac Bridge which spans the sea channel between Komarna on the northern mainland and the Pelješac peninsula, thus passing entirely through Croatian territory.



Peljesac Bridge under construction

Image: AP Photo

The 1.5 mile bridge was built by the China Road and Bridge Corporation, to a design by **Marjan Pipenbahr** who is a graduate of the University of Maribor. Work began in July 2018 and was connected in July 2021. In 2017 the European Union allocated €357 million to complete the project — roughly

85 per cent of the total cost. The design was modified to raise the bridge by 55 metres after Bosnian objections to the design which they claimed would affect access to their only port. A notable achievement.

A final Note

A worrying note to end on – could the days of Bionic PMs be upon us? Doctors already use robots to supplement their manual skills in surgery even though they have not yet perfected the diagnostic computer. Computer can crack jokes, according to a BBC report, so what other human activities could they start to replicate? What jobs could it take?

A report in the Times suggests a compromise in the legal profession. How about a chip in your brain to make you faster and better? There is a fundamental flaw in the report as it claims it will also make lawyers cheaper but can you see any legal eagle reducing their fees of around £1,500 an hour, switching to “billable units of attention”.

A report published by the Law Society, which represents solicitors in England and Wales, forecast that brain implants were likely to become the “iPhone of the future” in the legal profession. The report, *Neurotechnology, Law and the Legal Profession*, notes that such technology is already being used to treat neurological conditions such as Parkinson’s disease and to monitor employees’ attention when they are working. Neurotech is also of great interest to the military – with the prospect of cognitively enhanced cyborg super-soldiers on the horizon. Sounds like one for the PMO to sort out!



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.