

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



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### INTRODUCTION

This is the height of what is optimistically called the Silly Season – where politician slope off on their ill-deserved holidays, leaving the rest of us to take our last public holiday before Christmas. This week we have our Bank Holiday, so called because the Banks a closed and traditionally it marks the end of the Summer so everyone hopes for a warm, sunny long weekend before we get into the more dreary days of Autumn. Alas, there has been precious little sun but we should just be grateful we have not had the life-threatening weather our Continental chums have endured.

So, what is there to talk about if the politicos are off somewhere exotic? Well, the theme this month is AWARDS. Yes, we need to talk about successes in the Project World and where better to start than the built environment. There are other awards to celebrate, too, so we can take a peek at some institutional awards as well as some less obvious ones.

### AWARDS FOR GOVERNMENT PROJECTS

Crowded out last month, this is a late take on the Infrastructure and Projects Authority (IPSA) report on the Government Major Projects Portfolio (GMPP). This is an interesting and quite brave piece of work as it is a warts and all report in the public domain. For those who want to read the full report, you will find it here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/infrastructure-and-projects-authority-annual-report-2022-23>. The 82-page report (and 180 pages of supporting reports on individual projects) is available in PDF, Word and Open Document (ODT) formats and is a 10 Mb download. The supporting data is available in either CSV or Excel format

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so there is no excuse for missing an interesting read. And we will be asking questions later!

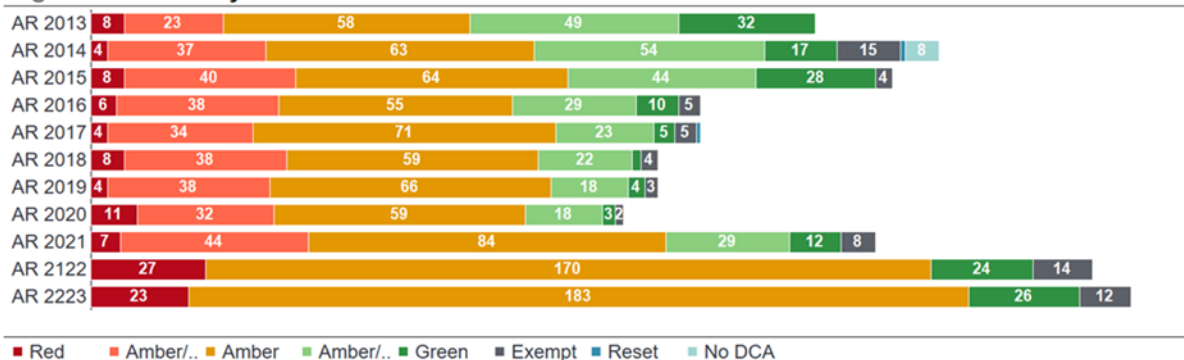
As you would expect, the portfolio is not small – this year it consists of 244 major projects, up on last year’s 235 across 22 departments. Among the most important examples are the Department for Transport’s (DfT) Lower Thames Crossing, which we reported on last year, and the Thames Tideway, which is the biggest investment in London’s sewage system since Bazalgette - who established the system in the mid-19th century – built the Embankment.

Considering what it has to cover, the report is a good read and does not seem to hide the bad news in the 60 pages of narrative reporting, but the remaining 180 pages of detailed project report are a pretty tedious read. There are some pretty whizzy graphics, too, and I reproduce a couple later.

The Fourth Estate (Press in normal speak) focused on the level of confidence Ministers have in the successful delivery of their projects. Actually, they don’t have confidence, their Civil Servants who are briefed by the National Audit Office, do. This is expressed as DCA (Delivery Confidence Assessment). The report states that this is an assessment of the likelihood of a project delivering its objectives to time and cost. Unsurprisingly, briefers use a RAG system. The end of financial year snapshot for 2023 showed 25 projects rated green (10% of the GMPP) and 23 projects were assigned red (9%) and the other 183 projects (75%) were rated amber.

Perhaps more interesting than the current headline numbers are the change in performance illustrated below.

**Figure 8: DCA Analysis 2013-2023**

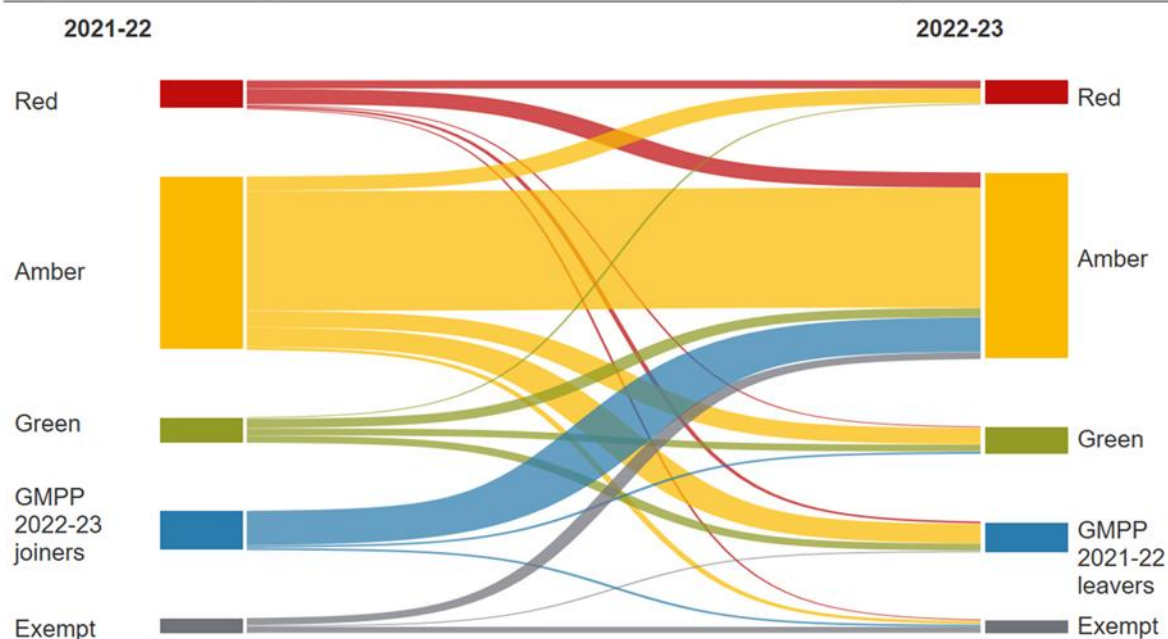


**Graphic: IPA Report**

The report notes that in the first eight years there was a decrease in projects’ health, where the average project rating worsened from amber/green on the 2013 Annual Report to amber on the 2020 Annual Report. Since then, projects’ health is getting better, and the average project rating has improved over the past three years.

This seems to be borne out in the numbers for the current year compared to the previous one, seen in the following graphic from the report. I'm not sure I would read it that optimistically as the increase in Amber rated projects is worrying. You could, however, take the view that this simply represents increased scrutiny and realism – something sadly lacking in many major projects.

**Figure 9: DCA changes between the 2021-22 and 2022-23 Annual Reports**



Graphic: IPA Annual Report

## INSTITUTIONAL AWARDS

The Royal Institution of British Architects (RIBA) released the names of the winners of their National Awards. Projects are submitted to the region or nation in which the building is situated and judged first for RIBA Regional Awards before being judged for RIBA National Awards.

The list of National Award-winning projects is 30 strong and comprise 16 from London, 3 are in Scotland; 2 each in Wales; the South and West Midlands with one each in Northern Ireland, South East, South West, Yorkshire and North West.

Readers may recall last year's winner Niall McLaughlin Architects: their Saltmarsh House, on the Isle of Wight won a Regional award. Other previous winners with National Awards this year include Courtauld Connects project at the Courtauld Institute of Art by Witherford Watson Mann who won in 2013.

Two practices have secured double entries on this year's National Awards list: Mæ Architects and Rural Office. Mæ's Sands End Arts and Community Centre in Fulham was shortlisted for last year's Stirling Prize; Niall Maxwell, principal of Carmarthen-

based Rural Office, and James Macdonald Wright won RIBA's House of the Year award in 2017 for Caring Wood in Kent.

The shortlist for this year's Stirling Prize, is due to be announced in early September.

## PROJECT MANAGEMENT AWARDS

The Association for Project Management (APM) also announced their Awards shortlist. Their panel of 60 expert judges clearly had a tough job to sort out finalists from the 238 entrants across the 18 categories. The full list is too long to include here but you can find it at <https://www.apm.org.uk/apm-awards/#finalists>. Winners will be announced at the Awards ceremony on Monday 20 November.



The gala night has **RPC UK Ltd** as its headline sponsor and will be held at the Park Plaza, Westminster Bridge, London. **Ellie Taylor**, the well-known TV personality, is the host for the night. She is a comedian, actress, model, and presenter. She has appeared on 8 Out Of 10 Cats, Live at the Apollo, and Mock the Week. She has hosted Live At The Apollo and series five of The Great British Pottery Throwdown, and was a contestant in the twentieth series of Strictly Come Dancing.

## SPORTING AWARDS

Fans of cycling had a major cause for celebration as the first ever combined UCI World Championships were held in Scotland last month. In the first event of its kind - never seen nor cycled before - the world's greatest riders came together in Glasgow and across Scotland to compete at the highest level. With 13 championships in 7 disciplines, this was a major feat of organisation and no doubt called for considerable stakeholder coordination.



Competition was spectacular – whether it was the urban events in the BMX categories with their unbelievable aerials, intense racing on street layouts or the more traditional forms of road and track racing, there was something for every enthusiast. Competitors were treated to

some of Scotland's "interesting" summer weather with sharp showers and on one occasion, some unseasonal snow.

## **AWARD POTENTIAL**

This is a project that really needs its own award. The UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) unveiled its new Vaccine Development and Evaluation Centre (VDEC). The new facility, in over 2,800 square meters of laboratory space at Porton Down, builds on Britain's pandemic legacy and will help develop life-saving new vaccines.

The centre is situated at the UKHSA's Porton Down site, co-located with other services delivered separately by partners including the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory. It is seen as a major part of UKHSA's strategy and incorporates over 200 leading scientists working on around 100 wide-ranging projects, including tackling deadly pathogens with pandemic potential. The Centre's work is conducted throughout the vaccine lifecycle, from early in the vaccine product design through to evaluating vaccine effectiveness, which continues when new variants arise.



Image: Gov.UK

VDEC will target pathogens for which a vaccine does not exist or is not regulated in the UK, or could be improved, such as avian influenza, mpox (monkeypox) or hantavirus, a severe infection that can pass from rodents to humans. VDEC's teams are already running phase one clinical trials for what could be a world-first vaccine against Crimean-Congo haemorrhagic fever, a virus that is spread by the bite of an infected tick and is fatal in

about 30% of cases.

According to Prof Dame Jenny Harries, chief executive of the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA), "Covid, of course, is not a one-off. "We say it [Covid] was the biggest public health incident for a century, but I don't think any of us think it'll be a century before the next". The combination of climate change, urbanisation and people living closer to animals – the source of many new diseases which transfer to people - means we're facing a "rising tide of risk", she says.

The new vaccine research centre is concentrating on three types of threat:

- known infections that are getting harder to deal with, such as antibiotic-resistant superbugs;

- potential threats that might cause a problem, including bird flu and new Covid variants;
- "Disease X" – something unforeseen, like Covid, which takes the world by complete surprise.

## **CLOSING REMARKS**

**Loch Ness Monster.** Returning to Scotland, there is one more important project to report. This one is tackling a mystery that has existed for several generations. The problem is that not all the stakeholders want the project to succeed. The project enlisted volunteers from around the world to take part in what has been called the biggest monster search in 50 years.

Volunteers from around the world were allocated locations around the 23-mile (37-km) long lake from which to monitor for any signs of Nessie, while others took to boats. The Loch Ness Centre, which partnered with voluntary research team Loch Ness Exploration to organise "The Quest", said they would be using surveying equipment that had not previously been tried at the loch. Other high-tech help included sonars for mapping the lakebed, thermal-imaging drones for scanning the surface and hydrophones to hear strange sounds from the depths.

The so-called monster has a much longer history than popularly supposed. The first written record of a monster relates to the Irish monk St Columba, who is said to have banished a "water beast" to the depths of the River Ness in the 6th century. After that, the legend seems to have dwindled in popular consciousness but the modern myth of the monster gathered pace in the 1930s but the famous 1934 photo (below) was later revealed to be a fake



Image: Getty Images

Search Leader Alan McKenna claimed the search was partly aimed at maintaining the image of the monster but the search is really just about having fun, keeping faith and exploring the natural world.

It has been claimed that the legend brings in as much £41 million (about \$52 million) each year to Scotland's economy, according to one 2018 study reported by Scotland's Press and

Journal newspaper, enthusiasts like McKenna deny any commercial interest.

The results? "We did hear something. We heard four distinctive 'gloops'," said search leader Alan McKenna. "We all got a bit excited, ran to go make sure the recorder was on and it wasn't plugged in."

## 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](mailto:miles.shepherd@msp-ltd.co.uk).