

UK Project Management Round Up¹



*By Miles Shepherd
Executive Advisor & International Correspondent
Salisbury, England, UK*

INTRODUCTION

Here we are at the start of January, a new year ahead and a hard working year behind us. As most readers will know, January is named after the ancient Roman god, Janus. He has the distinction of being variously, and presumably not all at the same time, the god of beginnings, gates, transitions, time, duality, doorways, passages, frames, and endings. Right now, I'll just take it that he is looking forward and back but will return to his other attributes later as I feel he represents the PM profession rather neatly. Looking back will briefly recall the successes of 2023 and looking forward covers what we think 2024 brings us.



LOOKING BACK



My report this time last year tried to look forward and back so perhaps I should start by looking at how successful my efforts turned out. In a word, my forecasts were few and not very accurate.

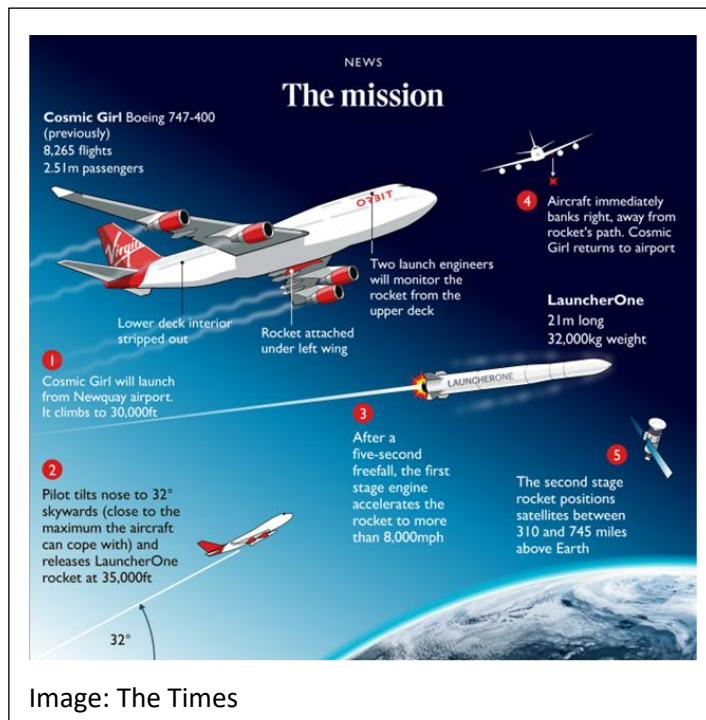
The main event of the year was the formal transfer of governance to HM King Charles III. This was accomplished with much fanfare through the Coronation. This portfolio of projects was successfully conducted as many readers will have seen on TV. The management of the procession alone was a complex project (see image left, Royal Airforce Contingent negotiating Admiralty Arch). The military aspect is highly symbolic as the UK Armed Forces owe their allegiance to the Crown, not the Government. (Image courtesy RAF Website)

¹ How to cite this report: Shepherd, M. (2024). UK Project Management Roundup, *PM World Journal*, Vol. XIII, Issue I, January.

We also covered a range of pharma and medical project successfully concluded in the year and this successful trend continued in 2023, particularly in the diagnosis and treatment of a range of cancers. I am also glad to recall that there were also many international successes such as progress to eliminate malaria and polio continue to make progress.

My optimistic reporting of progress by Virgin Orbit and their proposed launch of a satellite proved just that. The launch from fledgling Spaceport in Cornwall was successful but an unexpected failure at an altitude of about 180km, the upper stage experienced an anomaly which "prematurely ended" the first burn. All 6 satellites aboard were lost, and the failure ultimately led to the closure of the firm with a personal loss to owner Sir Richard Branson of some £1.5 bn.

The other feature from that report was about terraforming and the role of worms in mankind's occupation of distant planets. Sadly, this innovative approach received little further attention in space industry. No redundancies among the worm workforce have been reported.



BREXIT

Most of the UK population had hoped that we would see end of this long running saga as the laws established in compliance with European Union legislation will automatically be rescinded in 2022. Many laws were retained, particularly those relating to specific products such as motor cars, but others, such as those relating to pension funds and some financial products remain challenging, particularly as compliance may be linked to unresolved political problems such as the Irish Border, the Good Friday Agreement and commercial interests. Unsurprisingly, many key decisions were not taken, problems were kicked further down the road and some by default were allowed to stand. So we await further action – but no-one is holding their breath.

LOOKING AHEAD

In an effort to improve on my forecasting record, its time to look at what the New Year promises. The two big areas for speculation are green projects – particularly those aimed at reducing the impact of greenhouse gas emission and those seeking to deal with the consequences already incurred such as the raising of sea levels; and artificial

intelligence (AI). I think there is a reason to be confident about this new year as so many of the important areas of the project world look positive.

- **Green Construction Projects.** These are projects that are carbon neutral in their outcomes – something seen now in the construction sector. Press reporting tends to focus on the sheer scale of the net-zero challenge, hardly surprising when the UK building stock comprises some 5.6 million “old” buildings. By this we mean buildings, especially private housing built pre-1919. Historic England estimate a work force of some 86,000 to bring these old buildings up to spec. Then there is a need for another 86,000 workers for new construction. It seems odd that both categories of construction require the same number of trained construction workers. At the very least we have a much greater awareness of the need.
- **Green Travel Projects.** Over the Christmas period a journalist on the staff of *The Times* recounted his experience as a passenger in King Charles’ Aston Martin. The interesting thing about the King’s car is not that he purchased it in 1970 but that it runs on cheese and wine! According to reports, the King “requested” Aston Martin to convert it to biofuel. "He’s got this beautiful Aston Martin that runs on biofuel, which is basically surplus wine and cheese whey, which is pretty incredible," author **Chris Jackson** said. "He’s obviously very passionate about the environment, [and] he’s got this beautiful car, a DB6 Volante Aston Martin, that’s environmentally friendly."



The King’s Aston Martin Volante - Image: Chris Jackson / Getty Images

- **Other Green Fuels.** We have also seen the first trans-Atlantic flight. At the beginning of last month, **Virgin Atlantic** became the first big airline to operate a transatlantic passenger flight powered by 100 per cent sustainable aviation fuel, or SAF, a biofuel that has 80 per cent fewer emissions than traditional jet fuel. It is not clear when this will become the norm but Rolls Royce are planning to combine its UltraFan technology with 100 per cent sustainable aviation fuel.

- **Alternative Energy Projects.** There have been several weeks in the past year when UK has used no electricity produced by fossil fuels. This trend has spread to the European Union where in May last year, they too produced more energy from wind and solar sources than from fossil fuels. Good news all round! However, we hear conflicting reports from the UK off-shore interests which highlighted the failure of last year's public auction for new offshore wind projects, yet as the year ended, we hear reports that **Masdar**, the Abu Dhabi state-controlled developer and German based RWE plan to invest £11 billion in a project to build one of the world's biggest offshore wind farms in British waters. Construction could start as soon as 2025. According to press releases Masdar is acquiring a 49 per cent stake in the twin Dogger Bank South projects, more than 60 miles off the east coast of England, for an undisclosed sum. The combined wind farm would have a maximum capacity of three gigawatts, comprise an estimated £11 billion investment and create up to 3,000 jobs.

- **Green Infrastructure.** One of the problems faced by offshore wind farms is connecting to the National Grid, as we reported in September last year. It seems the Government is taking action by changing the rules for connecting. This is not a new idea and the Government were mulling this over a year ago. However, National Grid's electricity system operator (ESO), which is responsible for administering grid connections, said the new "first ready, first connected" process would replace the existing "first come, first served" system from the start of 2025. According to *The Times*, the queue for grid connections contains hundreds of projects that could generate almost 400 gigawatts of electricity — more than twice what is forecast to be needed to meet the government's goal of decarbonising the power system by 2035. But as many as 70% of these projects fail to materialise.

OTHER CAUSES FOR OPTIMISM.

- **Power Diversification.** There was a trend last for some of the oil giants to flag a move into off shore energy. In UK, this was signaled by Shell who have more than 2.6 gigawatts (GW) of offshore wind capacity in operation and under construction, and more than 7.5 GW in the funnel of potential projects across North America, Europe, the UK and Asia (Shell equity). They are also investing in the next generation of wind technologies, including floating wind. Now they are joined by **BP** which is planning a move into off shore wind farms. The interesting part is that they appear to buck the trend of asking for money from the Government to subsidise construction. Plans have been laid to construct two huge farm projects, Morgan and Mona, in the Irish Sea. According to **Bernard Looney**, BP chief executive, building could start as soon as "late next year" (2024). Building without government subsidy would be a first for the sector and would certainly set a precedent. The wind farms together would provide up to 214 turbines about 20 miles off the coasts of north Wales and northwest England and could power 3.4 million homes.



- **Launch Pads.** As reported in previous editions, there is no shortage potential launch sites for space satellites in UK and there is even a Government “Guide to UK Spaceports”. Locations range from Scottish Islands (North Uist & Unst), Scottish mainland (Sutherland) – all of which are rocket launch sites due to open for business in 2024 to air launch businesses based at airports in Scotland (Machrihanish & Prestwick), Wales (Llanbedr) and England (Newquay), all of which are operational but awaiting CAA clearance. SaxaVord Spaceport (Unst) has been received approval from the Civil Aviation Authority to begin orbital launches in 2024. It will be the first fully-licensed spaceport in Western Europe able to launch vertically into orbit.
- **Medical Advances.** Medical sciences continue to progress and one of the most significant advance in a year filled with significant project outcomes is the discovery of the link between neurons are pushed into a kind of self-destruct mode, known as necroptosis, by the release of a messenger molecule. This discover, at University College London’s Dementia Research Institute could lead the development of a drug that blocks this messenger thus slowing or slow or even preventing the disease.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

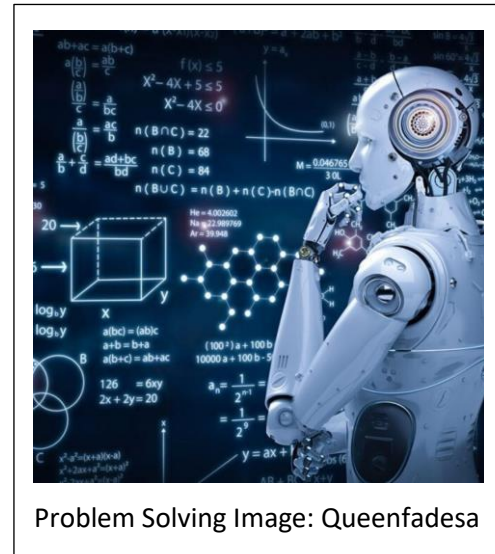
Artificial Intelligence or AI has been a headline across the world for at least 5 years and 2023 saw some remarkable steps – not all of them forward. ChatBots took the world by storm with rapid updates of Chat GPT and dire warnings of the end of civilisation as we know it. We struggled through and AI is becoming mainstream. AI has caused many improvements in the professional world as opportunities for improved research bring about changes. For the time being, the professions are needed to drive the problem solving but time may come when machines will become self directing – shades of Terminator?

The main concern is what role will AI take in the project world? The Association for Project Management (APM) has been considering this and seems to welcome the opportunities it offers. It will be interesting to see how the toe in the water we have recently seen is translated into the Body of Knowledge. I suspect most professional project managers see Ai as something that offers possibilities but will be cautious in their approach. AI seems, at first glance, to offer ways to improve project delivery, possibly through improved project controls.

- **Project Controls.** The debate over just what this term means continues. Some see it as embracing all aspects of project management while others see it as only one part and a pretty mechanical part at that. This is reflected to some extent in the debate currently raging in the Earned Value Management (EVM) world. There have been encouraging signs that project owners are taking a less rigid view of its implementation, as evidenced in part by the development of an ISO standard on EVM and a follow up on its implementation. In USA, the use of EVM in Department of Defence IT and hardware projects has just been banned. This is in conflict with the guidance offered in the excellent GAO update on Agile project.

LEFT OVERS

Not of the turkey kind – and not BREXIT this time. High Speed 2 supposedly bit the dust towards the end of last year but that was “only” to termination of Phase 2, or as HS2 put it “*scaling back the railway to a high-speed line between London Euston and Birmingham Curzon Street. The new line will connect to the West Coast Main Line at Handsacre Junction, just north of Birmingham, to allow HS2 trains to*



Problem Solving Image: Queenfadesa



Image: HS2

reach cities in the North of England and Scotland on the existing West Coast Main Line.”

This will require some major re-jigging of plans involving:

- Safeguarding on Phase 2a of the original HS2 route, between the West Midlands and Crewe, will be formally lifted in the coming weeks. Issuing new compulsory purchase notices has stopped in most cases.
- Safeguarding on the Phase 2b route, between Crewe and Manchester Piccadilly, will be amended by summer 2024 to allow for the requirements of Northern Powerhouse Rail.

The first impact is the transfer of funds from rail to road in the form of an augmented fund to fill in some of the pot holes in our roads. This is apparently part of the Northern Powerhouse Rail

Reports in *Construction Enquirer* note that around £5bn-worth of contracts will be let in 2024 to oversee building of the tracks, power, signalling, overhead lines and the railway’s landmark network control centre. Major milestones coming up in the early part of this year include the start of work on Birmingham’s new Curzon Street station and breakthrough of the first Tunnel Boring Machine being used to bore the Chilterns tunnel – the longest on the route at 10 miles. Eleven contracts are already out to tender and are expected to be awarded in 2024, unlocking more opportunities for the UK’s construction, engineering and rail sector. So much for a terminated project!

CLOSING REMARKS

The British Baked Bean



Image: Lindsey Smith/BBC

This is a major breakthrough! Readers may recall the project failure announced in 2022 when a small-scale trial to grow the haricot beans needed for the product failed due to the summer heatwave.

Scientists at the University of Warwick have taken 12 years to produce the seeds which were harvested in September at a farm in Lincolnshire.

Beans are big business as more than two million tins are eaten every day, with all the beans grown

in the US, Canada, Ethiopia and China. Attempts in UK to replicate foreign baked beans have failed the taste test so the outcome of this project are important.

David McDiarmid from canning company Princes, said they were "very proud" to have secured the first supply of British-grown haricot beans. He went on to say "There is a lot of work going on in the food industry in terms of alternate sources, particularly with one eye on greater self-sufficiency for the UK, or the environmental angle," He added: "We are not always going to be able to be self-sufficient, tuna isn't going to swim around the North Sea any time soon.

The beans were grown by **Andrew Ward** who grew them on his farm in Leadenham, watched them being tinned at the Princes factory in Spalding. Princes produce 264 million tins of beans every year for Branston foods and supermarkets' own-brands.

Most of the 2023 crop are going into seeds so the product will not be available until 2025 but this is another step toward reducing reliance on food imports.

Ecological Projects

The past year was overshadowed by the continuing impact of avian flu which has devastated colonies around the world. Sea bird colonies at famous sites such as Bempton Cliffs and Troup Head have been devastated by the highly infectious disease. Conservation bodies such as the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) have funded surveys to understand how seabird populations have been impacted, as well as new scientific research to increase our understanding of the virus and how to tackle it. Both BTO and RSPB report increased staffing which includes working with governments and other conservation bodies to develop national response plans that give the best outcome for wild birds.

On a more positive note, there have been successful developments in wildlife habitats as a result of the King's series of Nature Reserves. The programme was announced in May 2023 and will see the creation of a new 'King's Series of National Nature Reserves', with five major National Nature Reserves named every year for the next five years - 25 in total. The first - the Lincolnshire Coronation Coast National Nature Reserve was declared last summer. Over 12 square miles in area, it contains a wonderful variety of sand dunes, saltmarsh, mudflats and freshwater marshes, which support many breeding and wintering birds, natterjack toads, special plants and insects. The remaining four National Nature Reserves for 2023-2024 likely to include the Mendip Hills in Somerset, Moccas Park in Herefordshire, Ingleborough in North Yorkshire and Lullington in East Sussex.



In addition to these new nature reserves comes news of A set of ground-breaking projects to help the River Tees Estuary adapt to climate change, restore valuable habitat for internationally important wildlife and reconnect the river's tributaries. With funding of more than £30million, the **Tees**

Tidelands programme aims to realign flood defences, restore mudflat and saltmarsh habitat, and remove tidal barriers so

migratory fish can return to rivers where they have been absent for hundreds of years. The programme aims to create over 50 hectares of mudflats, saltmarsh and other valuable estuarine habitats, as well as reducing flood risk for homes and businesses. **Vicky Ward**, Natural England's Tees Estuary Recovering Nature Project Manager, said:

"The Tees Tidelands programme is an incredible contribution to the Tees Estuary and will provide significant reduction to flood risks for local communities and industries.

Habitat restoration work taking place throughout the programme will also strengthen nature's recovery across the estuary. Natural England is excited to be working closely with the Environment Agency and wider partner organisations to coordinate and deliver best outcomes for nature over the long-term."

Other recovery projects include improvements to the currently 371 Marine Protected Areas covering 38% of UK seas, restoration of long-lost oyster reefs to the Dornoch Firth, a Special Area of Conservation, and replanting sea grass in a number of sites around the UK coast.

A God for Project Managers

Returning to my comments about Janus, here are my reasons for feeling he might well represent Project Managers. If you recall, he represents beginnings, gates, transitions, time, duality, doorways, passages, frames, and endings. As we know, all projects have a formal beginning and ending so the notion of a god to help us at these critical points in the project sounds pretty useful to me. Transition is what all projects are about so as we pass along the project, divine help is often needed, especially when dealing with some tricky stakeholders. Duality is our stock in trade as we need to be able to support stakeholders and also satisfy the technical requirements, able to see both sides of arguments and reach amicable solutions. He is usually depicted as having two faces and some might think this is the epitome of the Project Manager. I would say these cynics are completely wrong – we are consistent problem solvers who need to see both sides and adjust plans accordingly.

And so I wish you an optimistic New Year!

About the Author



Miles Shepherd

Salisbury, UK



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 also immediate past 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.