

UK Project Management Round Up



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INTRODUCTION

The start of the summer season is a strange time and this report reflects that as we have a look at a project that has just ended, round up some new projects, survey the situation for some “green” projects and continue the hunt for good news. There is also some news about Artificial Intelligence and not just about how it affects project management and the latest from the Association for Project Management (APM). To get you in the right mood, we’ll start with the good news

GOOD NEWS

You could be forgiven for thinking this section is a little thin this month but when you look at the two leads you must agree they are pretty important. I’m not sure they are related but the first shows there is no limit to the importance of project management so that allows us to take some consolation that one of the major threats to humanity is not so scary after all.

➤ **PM to control your sex life.** If this doesn’t catch your attention then nothing will! My Transatlantic Imp reports a story that first saw the light of day in August 2013. Back in the day, some people were using spreadsheets to monitor their sex lives. This has been widely reported on-line (try Googling it for more detail) but more recently, a story ran in an East Coast (USA) daily and was picked up here in the Economist in 2020 and most recently last month in *The Times*. Apparently it is now a thing for love life to be tracked via a spreadsheet in order to “optimise your relationship”. Seems to me this is taking project monitoring rather further than the project sponsor requires.

➤ **Human Race to Continue.** Having optimised your relationship, you may now contemplate the future of the human race. There is cause for cautious optimism as

news comes of sixteen companies, world leaders in artificial intelligence, have decided not to wipe out humankind with their products. This may come as welcome news to the man on the Clapham Omnibus, but other sources indicate that some of the world's leaders think it is their task and they have nuclear weapons to do the job. Human preservation emerged as one of the themes at the AI Summit in Seoul, sponsored by the governments of UK and Korea. There is more news on the AI front so read on.

➤ **Zero Emission Cement.** Concrete recycling is not new but there is a report in the journal *Nature* that claims a major breakthrough in construction technology. Researchers at the University of Cambridge have developed a new technique that can produce cement using waste concrete from demolished buildings and processing it in electric arc furnaces. According to the researchers this new technique could save billions of tonnes of carbon by 2050. Cement production is highly polluting and accounts for some 7.5 % of total greenhouse gas emissions. Hitherto, there was no known way to produce it at scale without impacts on the climate. However, the Cement 2 Zero Project, a joint research project between the Materials Production Institute and the University of Cambridge developed a potentially transformative solution to the problem. “We have definitely proved that cement can be recycled into cement,” says **Julian Allwood** at the University of Cambridge. “We are on course for making cement with zero emissions, which is amazing.”

See a report at <https://www.mpiuk.com/research-project-cement-2-zero.htm>.

CHELSEA

Readers of a certain age will recall the heady days of the Swinging Sixties and the King's Road, while those of a military persuasion will associate Chelsea with the Royal Hospital which houses the famous Pensioners. Still others will nostalgically associate it with the Royal Horticulture Society's annual bean feast, the Chelsea Flower Show.

Although most of the nearly 200,000 visitors are there for the flowers but those of us in the know recall this as a set of major projects which resulted in 20 spectacular show gardens, conceived by some of the world's best-known designers and constructed in just 19 days. The logistics are startling and involve the transportation of dozens of mature trees, huge numbers of plants and more than 2000 tonnes of earth. The whole show is dismantled



in a mere 5 days with many of the show gardens sold on to buyers around UK and a mammoth sale of plants on the final day.

NEW PROJECTS

There are, of course, thousands of new projects launched every month but I don't have space to cover more than a handful so I'll start with a small but carefully crafted project and build to a conclusion with a very short duration but high profile project affecting the whole of the United Kingdom.

➤ **Leicester City Railway Station Redevelopment.** The final designs for a



Artists impression of redevelopment
Image@ Leicester City Council

radical revamp of Leicester's historic railway station have been revealed by the city council. This small project (current budget £XXXmillion) is bound to be controversial as it involves knocking down the Parcel Yard pub to reveal the original façade of the historic, Grade-II listed station, which will be carefully restored to its Victorian glory, the authority has said. The railway station redevelopment is led by the city council and Network Rail, with £17.6 million from the Government's Levelling Up Fund. The statue of Thomas Cook, claimed to be the inventor of mass tourism will be moved to a more

prominent position. His first ever excursion was a trip from Leicester to Loughborough. **City Mayor Peter Soulsby** said: "Leicester's railway station is a landmark building but as a vital transport hub, it needs a radical revamp to meet the needs of a modern city the size of Leicester. The award of almost £18 million of extra Government investment into the city through the Levelling Up Fund is powerful endorsement of the importance of the project. It will make a vital and lasting contribution to Leicester's future growth and prosperity."

➤ **Wylfa New Nuclear.** Regular readers will recall that Wylfa is a twin reactor decommissioning power station located on the north coast of the Isle of Anglesey. The site is 20.8 hectares surrounded by grazing agricultural land and a Site of Special Scientific Interest. The site was purchased at a cost of £160 million from previous developers Hitachi who abandoned plans for a new reactor in 2019. As we closed for publication came news that the Government has launched talks with international energy companies to explore building a power station at site after announcing



Hitachi Horizon concept for Wylfa Image: Horizon

it as the first choice site for a large-scale gigawatt nuclear power plant. Plans are not available and according to David TC Davies, Welsh Secretary, he won't "put a date" on the project delivery which is bound to attract fervent opposition from those who do not understand that the future of fossil free energy lies in this technology. He did say, however, that Wylfa is "destined to have a nuclear power station". It is too early for design decisions to be made but Ministers say the plant will be a large-scale power plant. It is not yet clear how this fits with the current Government's strategy for small modular reactors but such a project would bring thousands of jobs to the region and be a major boost to the local economy.

➤ **New Laboratories.** On a rather smaller scale but just as important economically comes news that the Crown Estates are planning a £1.5 billion programme to build more laboratories nationwide. The programme is scheduled to kick off at the old Debenhams store in Oxford city centre which has been empty since 2021. Press reports claim that the King's property company plans to invest £125 million to buy the site although closer reading indicates that a long lease is being acquired and



Debenhams site, Oxford Image@ Alamy

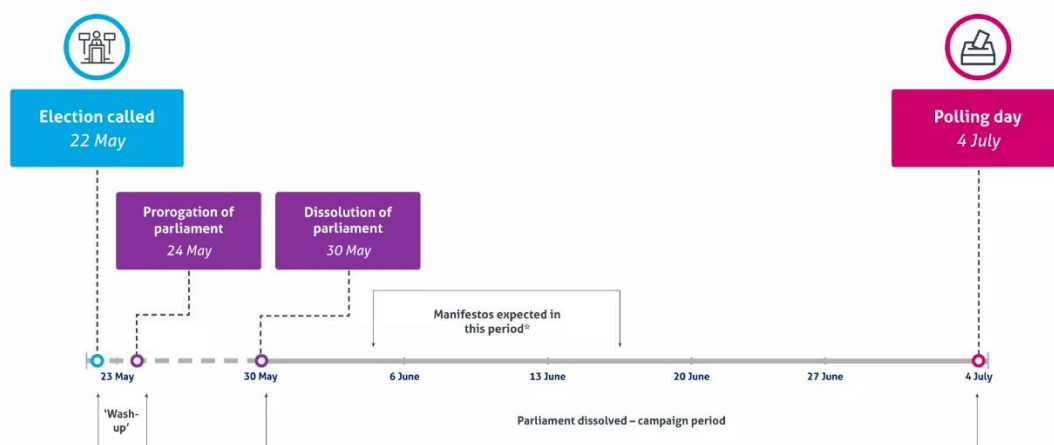
the current owners will retain the ground floor commercial units while the labs will be built on the upper floors. The Oxford project is subject to planning permission but it

is hoped the labs will be operational by late 2027 or early 2028. Lab space has been at a premium for several years and is seen as hindering spin-outs from university research which can result in British technology being developed overseas.

➤ **General Election.** Politically informed readers may have noticed that UK has launched a major project. A cross between a circus performance with lots of clowns, and a complex portfolio managed by competing firms, UK based readers will be subjected to a continuous stream of claims and counter claims. It has started already with the major parties promising to re-introduce National Service, voting for 16 year olds and magically finding 8,000 doctors for the National Health Service. The main point is the short time from flash (the announcement to Bang (Election Day) to use a military expression. This gives the political parties about 43 days. The Institute for Government produced a snappy analysis of what happens now that the Prime Minister has called the election.

What happens when the general election is called?

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Source: Institute for Government analysis. Notes: Polling day takes place 25 working days after the dissolution of parliament. Weekends, bank holidays and Christmas Eve are not counted as working days. *Estimated dates. For general elections between 1992 and 2019, manifestos were released between 18 and 29 days before polling day.

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From a project perspective, a number of high profile infrastructure projects will be on hold until the new Government is in place. So the future for Wylfa is far from clear and some other schemes such as airport expansions and the Stonehenge bypass.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IN THE NEWS

It seems impossible to escape this topic as there are almost daily stories in the Press and they range from the downright scary to improbably optimistic. In the past month, there have been stories about AI in care homes to provide support for dementia victims and in the classroom as a sort of teaching assistant. Personally, I am somewhat skeptical as AI is a product of IT development and we know how badly wrong many IT

projects end. While this is not an entirely fair position to adopt, there are far too many major failures to inspire confidence, so the second conference on AI safety – the AI Seoul Summit is a welcome development.



Sponsored by the governments of the Republic of Korea and the United Kingdom, the declaration that top developers signed a voluntary charter that they will not develop or deploy any AI system that poses an extreme risk to humanity as reported above. This is just as well as 75 experts from 30 countries concluded that developers building AI systems “understand little about

how their systems operate” and scientific knowledge is “very limited”. This was reported in the International Scientific Report on Advanced AI Safety available at

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/66474eab4f29e1d07fadca3d/international_scientific_report_on_the_safety_of_advanced_ai_interim_report.pdf)

The report was commissioned by Britain at the Bletchley Park AI safety conference in November. Backed by the United Nations and the European Union, the panel reviewed all the current scientific literature in order to give a clear “state of play” on artificial intelligence. A further report is due before the AI Action Summit.

One of the key undertakings from the Summit is a commitment by developers to share models while governments attending agrees to establish safety institutes to manage AI development and safety. The UK established its own Institute in 2024 and announced that the UK government will offer grants to researchers to study how to protect society from AI risks such as deepfakes and cyberattacks, as well as helping to harness its benefits, such as increased productivity. The most promising proposals will be developed into longer-term projects and could receive further funding.

ENERGY ISSUES

Supply Side. Always a topic of national importance is the electricity supply, so I was surprised to see that UK domestic energy generation at an all-time low according to a report from the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero. North Sea oil production fell to its lowest level since records began in 1948 and gas output was the second lowest. Energy imports in 2023 amounted to a net 41.1 % of energy consumption with Norway our largest source of natural gas. Liquefied natural gas (LNG) become increasingly reliant on the US supplies as the largest source of LNG after overtaking Qatar for the first time in 2022.

Alternative Supplies. As reliance on fossil fuels continues to fall, the proportion of electricity generated by renewables matched a previous record set in 2022 and accounted for 47.3 % of the overall mix. The government has set a target of eliminating

carbon emissions from the electricity grid by 2035. More specifically, wind power generated 32 % of electricity over the past 12 months to April 2024. Gas power fell to 31 per cent, meaning it lost the No 1 spot it had held for 28 years. “Britain has become only the sixth country in the world where wind farms are the top source of electricity,” said Iain Staffell, of Imperial College London, who collated the data from National Grid.

Hydrogen Fuel. Suiso is a developer of a low energy near zero emission microwave-driven methane cracking process for onsite generation of Hydrogen. It won a government competition in 2022 to provide technology to supply hydrogen energy, using novel microwave technology to extract hydrogen from natural gas. It captures the carbon in the form of carbon black, which can be used to make tyres, batteries and inks. The south Yorkshire-based company is working on a hydrogen generator, and recently has raised £3 million from the Northern Powerhouse Investment Fund (NPIF).

Energy Storage. My Scottish Imp reminds me that north of the border is the place to be if you are interested in ways to store energy. We learn that a landowner has plans for a £3bn pumped storage energy project at Loch Ness. The principle is simple and relies on the gravitational force of water between two reservoirs at different elevations. In times of low demand, excess energy is used to pump water to the higher reservoir, storing energy. When demand peaks, the stored water is released to generate electricity, offering a balanced and responsive energy supply. Glen Earrach Energy, the project owners, having previous form with local wind and hydro projects are proposing a two-gigawatt project to generate 30 gigawatt-hours of clean energy from one complete discharge, enough to power more than a million well-insulated homes.

The plan is to dam and expand a small lake in the hills 1,500ft above Loch Ness, effectively turning it into a reservoir. Water would be pumped up from Loch Ness via a pipe drilled through the rock to the small lake. Water would then return under gravity to an underground turbine hall and then would discharge back into Loch Ness. the site is said to be one of the best in the UK for pumped storage.

There is a small snag here as Glen Earrach Energy is competing with at least two other similar projects, and they all seek approval to harness the waters of Loch Ness. There is some doubt over the viability of the schemes as, according to Brian Shaw of Ness District Salmon Fishery Board, “There is simply not enough water available to support all these developments.” Speaking to the Aberdeen Press & Journal, he called the proliferation of schemes a “pumped storage hydro gold rush” and “a race to pump Loch Ness dry”.

Floating Wind Turbines. Returning to Wales, we hear of a plan to develop the Port Talbot area into a “manufacturing hub” of floating offshore wind in the Celtic Sea. Associated British Ports (ABP), which owns and operates 21 ports in the UK is behind the scheme and is investing £500 million. Floating wind turbines are employed where

the water is too deep to allow sea-bed installation. Instead, the turbines are held in place by anchors.

Look back several Prime Ministers and you will find Boris Johnson making a promise to make Britain the “Saudi Arabia of wind power”. There is not enough space in the close in-shore waters to base traditional turbines and anyway, opposition is building over the competing needs of wind farm operators, fishing fleets and wildlife such as seabirds, all of which feel their interests to be damaged by yet more concentrations of giant turbines close to the shore. Hence attention to and interest in areas of deep water in the Celtic Sea off Wales, Cornwall and Devon, the northern North Sea off Scotland and Northumberland, and the waters between Northern Ireland and Scotland.

The world’s first two floating offshore wind farms lie in UK waters. Five turbines have been operating since 2017 in Norwegian firm Equinor’s Hywind farm, 15 miles from Peterhead in Aberdeenshire. Kincardine Offshore Wind Farm, is 9 miles off Stonehaven, Aberdeenshire, and has operated a single smaller turbine since 2018.

ABD hope to kick start a UK industry that will enable a home based supply of wind turbines and generate not just electricity but export sales.

PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATION NEWS

Association for Project Management. APM’s new structure seems to be bedding in with not too many teething problems. I noted the Built Environment Interest Network as the very latest to join the ranks. It is led by Dave Corbin, lately the Wessex Area Network Chair.

Body of Knowledge. Work continues apace on BoK 8 following last year’s consultation. This endorsed BOK 7 approach and highlighted a preference for an evolution of the seventh edition. The new structure retains the four-chapter structure but will be bookended by two new chapters: an opening chapter focusing on the organisational environment in which projects are delivered and a concluding chapter on emerging trends. This is the first-time emerging trends will feature in the APM Body of Knowledge, recognising the impact and importance of their role in our current and future projects. This idea is, of course, not new but technology has been available to support the execution. As the BoK usually follows a 5 year update cycle it will be interesting to see how this will be achieved.

Another recommendation was for the structure to align to the APM Competence Framework. The new edition will include sections, with relevant topics, on each of the 29 competence areas.

Other APM News. It has been a busy month for APM and if you wish to get the full picture you will have to check out the website (www.APM.org.uk) where you will find

their response to the National Infrastructure Commission’s Infrastructure Progress Review; a tribute to Tim Carter, former APM Chair and formidable PM responsible for the Eden Project; and details from an interesting webinar on Data, ethics and humans – solving the strategic misrepresentation bias in projects.

CLOSING REMARKS



Save the hedgehog!

Zoomers may recall Sonic, the blue hedgehog of Saturday morning TV. It was impervious to the evil machinations of countless enemies but his real-life counterpart is certainly not! In UK, the hedgehog population has fallen by an estimated 75% since the start of this century. Now, the People’s Trust for Endangered Species (PTES) and the British Hedgehog Preservation Society (BHPS) have joined forces in a project to save these attractive little

creatures. They have been joined by Nottingham Trent University, Zoological Society of London, Mammal Web, London Hog Watch and Durham University, and have launched a new National Hedgehog Monitoring Programme (NHMP).

The NHMP is a pilot project, that will, for the first time, produce robust hedgehog population estimates. Where previous large-scale surveys give us information on where hedgehogs are, this new survey will tell us how many there are. Surveys that indicate only where hedgehogs are present don’t reveal how that population is faring until it has disappeared, but monitoring numbers can give us warning if the population is in trouble. We’ll also look at regional and habitat differences in hedgehog populations, to identify what factors impact them. With this knowledge, we will make effective conservation plans, so that we can reverse the decline of this iconic species.

Camera traps and AI are being deployed to numbers in 30 locations in woods, farms and parks in locations from Dorset to Lanarkshire. AI filters out irrelevant images but citizen scientists review the remaining images, identifying animals. From this data, a computer model is able to estimate population density at regional and other levels, enabling conservation plans to be developed.

And so ends another month in the Project World in UK. All that remains is to remind you of the old saying, for every silver lining, there must be a cloud.

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.