

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



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### INTRODUCTION

It is high summer here and strange to report, it is actually sunny! Apart from the usual social events we delight in, we have seen a critical multi-party project hurtle along and by the time you read this, we will have a new Government. Cynics might claim there is no difference between the main protagonists but let's hope they are wrong and we get some sort of effective group running the country.

There are other major events of the past month to relate but before I get on to those, I'd like to mention a new section. Before my international Imps departed for cooler climes, they spotted a number of international projects and I will pass these on in the opening line up.

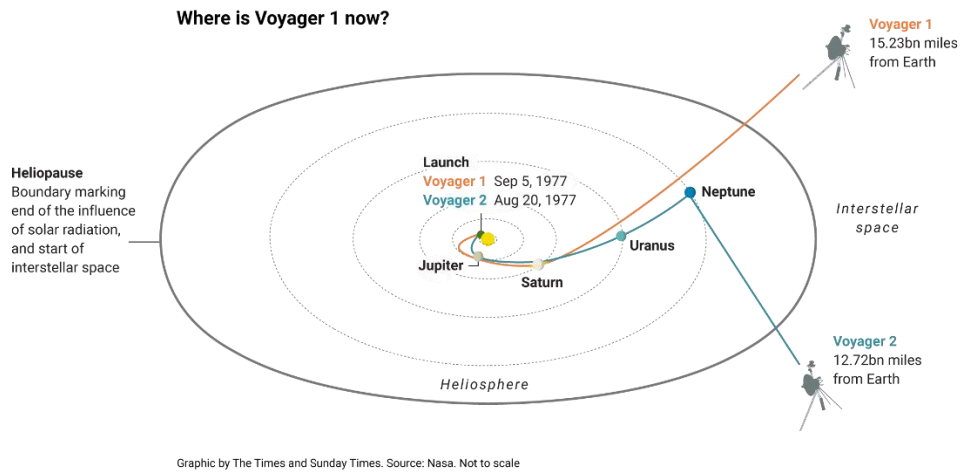
Meanwhile, back in Britain, we have news of a project related take over, some good news on the re-wilding front, an unusual research project and some downright bad news, all balanced out by a few stories that defy categorisation – so on with the significant events as seen from Shepherd Towers.

### SIGNIFICANT EVENTS ROUND UP

**Voyager.** The first item is of stellar importance, or at least from interstellar space. I'm reporting this as I doubt that others will and it is too significant to be allowed to pass unreported. You might have noticed that one of NASA's space vehicles, Voyager 1, has been out of contact with its home station since November last year. Well, it is now back online, sending its regular reports on plasma waves, magnetic fields and various particles through its four instruments. The space probe is more than 15 billion miles from Earth so sorting out problems involves sending commands that take almost 23 hours to reach the probe. After several months of work, engineers managed to restore basic communications on the health and status of its engineering systems.

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The graphic, from *The Times*, shows the progress and highlights of the Voyager probes. The fault that struck in November was traced to a chip in the flight data subsystem (FDS). The FDS is responsible for packaging the science and engineering data before it's sent to Earth. Mission controllers could tell the spacecraft was still receiving their commands and otherwise operating normally. The hardware fault was unrepairable, so NASA's engineers devised a workaround to place the affected code elsewhere in the FDS memory no single location is large enough to hold the section of code in its entirety. They also needed to adjust those code sections to ensure, for example, that they all still function as a whole. Any references to the location of that code in other parts of the FDS memory needed to be updated as well. Voyager 1's three computers were top of the range when Voyager was launched in 1977, but have about as much memory as a modern car key fob. "While Voyager 1 is back to conducting science, additional minor work is needed," Nasa's Jet Propulsion Laboratory said in a statement. Sadly, as its supply of nuclear fuel runs down, further glitches are expected.

**Chenab Bridge.** And so to India, where a spectacular rail project nears completion. Phase I of the Udhampur-Srinagar-Baramulla Rail Link (USBRL) project covered the 118 km long Qazigund-Baramulla section, was inaugurated in October 2009. Subsequent phases saw the inauguration of the 18 km long Banihal-Qazigund section in June 2013 and the 25 km long Udhampur-Katra section in July 2014. The 48.1 km long Banihal-Sangaldan section, was inaugurated by PM Narendra Modi on February 20, 2024.



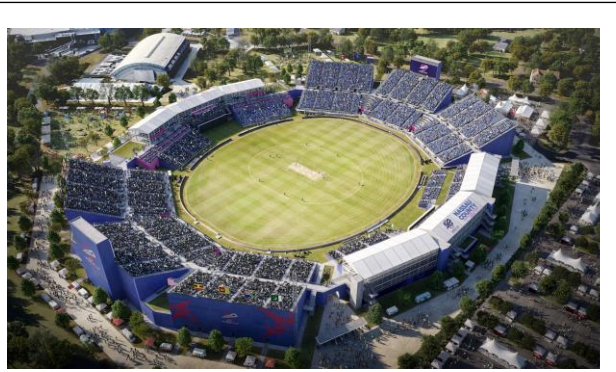
Chenab Rail Bridge Image: USBRL

Chenab bridge is part of the project and is 359m above the river bed and consists of a 467m of single arch span across the mighty Chenab river, it is the highest Railway Arch Bridge in the world.

Reasi Deputy Commissioner Vishesh Mahajan said, "This is an engineering marvel of the modern world.. It is a proud moment for us, as our engineers have created a marvel. It is the eighth wonder of

the world. The bridge, the wind speed, and its strength are wonderful. The exact date cannot be said, but I hope the day comes soon.”

**Sports Cross-Overs.** If you follow sport, you might be confused by recent events on either side of the Pond. Regular readers will recall my reports of the progress of Cricket in North America and the latest development is a breakthrough with several matches in the T20 World Cup being played in USA. The venues included New York and Dallas but both had problems, first the stadium for the opening game of the T20 World Cup in Dallas was damaged by deadly thunderstorms



New York Cricket venue. Image: ICC

that wrought havoc across the southern United States just days before the match between South Africa and USA. Matches in USA took place at Grand Prairie Stadium, Texas and Nassau County International Cricket Stadium, New York. The New York ground is a short project, in Eisenhower Park, about 48 kilometres east of Manhattan. It started in January 2024 and was completed in May 2024, just in time for the tournament.



Image: Queen Elizabeth Olympic Stadium

Not to be outdone in hosting major overseas sports, London hosted the New York Mets and Philadelphia Phillies in a two-game regular-season series as MLB returned to the London Stadium. The two teams are long time rivals.

The Mets and Phillies travelled back across the Atlantic each with a win under their belts and the series delivered on it's promise of box-office entertainment and edge-of-your-seat drama throughout the whole weekend.

This year's edition followed Chicago Cubs versus St. Louis Cardinals in 2023 and the inaugural series between the New York Yankees and Boston Red Sox in 2019.

Baseball and cricket enthusiasts would be hard pressed to tell you whether these exposures are converting fans but after returning to the Commonwealth Games and the Asian Games recently, T20 cricket will feature at the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics.

### GOOD NEWS

Closer to home comes news of the Zephyr Project. Zephyr is a High Altitude Platform Station (HAPS). According to the Airbus website, its “persistence” enables continuous flight for months at a time. Flying above 60,000 ft, Zephyr operates in the stratosphere, above weather and conventional air traffic. It remains the only fixed-wing HAPS to have demonstrated day and night longevity in the stratosphere. The platform is a cut-

price alternative to satellite constellations. The British built device could soon be mass-produced with the help of a \$100 million Japanese partnership.



Zephyr HAPS

Image: Aalto HAPSAirbus

Developed and built in Farnborough, Hampshire, and funded by Airbus, the solar-powered Zephyr, a so-called pseudo satellite, has been given the green light to begin testing in the Rift Valley in Kenya. Its wingspan is the breadth of an A380 Superjumbo, but the craft weighs less than an average British adult, depending on its payload.

If the project is successful, the aircraft could fulfil missions to provide telecommunications or surveillance. If you want one, it is likely to cost you a cool \$5 million, but this is a mere fraction of the launch costs of rockets or the creation of satellite constellations.

It is Festival time in UK and as I pen this report, Glastonbury is in full swing (literally). Other summer highlights include Henley Royal Regatta, Cowes Week and many others. It is also the academic conference season and of interest to project people, we have just had two top events: the annual International Research Network on Projects (IRNOP) at KTH in Stockholm, and the European Academy of Management (EURAM) in Bath. I missed IRNOP but I joined the estimate 2000+ participants at EURAM. This was my first conference for about 5 years so it was a real pleasure to catch up with many old friends and to see how conferences have changed in my absence. The Project Organizing team was well supported and covered some interesting topics addressing the UN Sustainability goals through governance, ethical issues leadership and a fascinating stream on the dark side of project management. Very thought provoking!

## NOT SURE NEWS

This is the half-way house with items that could be good news for some readers and bad news for others. I mentioned the General Election earlier – and the good news aspect of that is the comparatively short lead time (about 5 weeks) so we have not been subjected to the dubious rhetoric of fork-tongued party apparatchiks for as long as our American colleagues. However, the prospect of a change of government does prod speculation on some projects. First to reach the ears of my transport Imps is speculation that the **Heathrow Third Runway** is dead in the water. According to ex-head of British Airways, Willie Walsh, expansion plans face unsurmountable challenges such as the noise pollution created flying over London and air pollution.

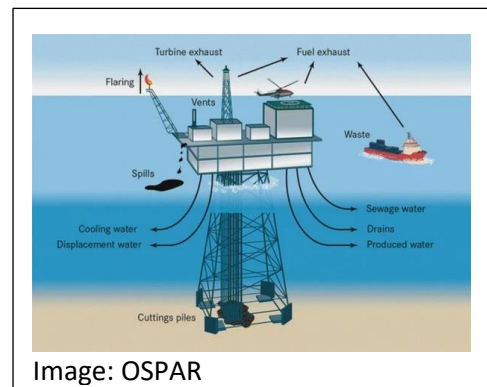
The **East Coast Mainline Upgrade** project is another conundrum. Intended to replace antiquated signalling, overhead line equipment and a new track layout – it should reduce journey times, create up to 10,000 extra seats a day for passengers, and improving reliability and punctuality. Now come reports that there is no confirmed date for the start of improved services despite the completion engineering works more than two years ago. Now we learn that the line is already at full capacity which may be the reason the new schedule has been pushed back from December this year to June

next. According to *Tim Shoveller*, chief executive of Freightliner Group and previously a senior executive at Network Rail, said: “There is not sufficient capacity. The line is full up before it even starts.” In contrast with the cost overruns, delays and swingeing cutbacks on the HS2 line from London to Manchester, the upgrade works on the east coast main line have been relatively straightforward since the project was approved in 2014.

Back in 2021, in a joint press release, **Turner & Townsend** and CBRE, announced that the companies had completed their previously announced transaction whereby CBRE acquired a 60% ownership interest in, and entered into a strategic partnership. Since the acquisition, Turner & Townsend has achieved a compounded revenue growth rate of more than 20%. News has come in that CBRE now have a 70% ownership stake in the combined Turner & Townsend/CBRE Project Management business, leaving the Turner & Townsend partners with the remaining 30%. According to *Bob Sulentic*, chair and CEO of CBRE, “Unifying our Project Management business will create an offering that is unmatched for its scale and breadth of capabilities, with more than 20,000 employees serving clients in over 60 countries. Powerful secular trends, particularly increased spending on infrastructure, green energy, and employee experience, are growth catalysts for this business, and we are well positioned to capitalize on this significant opportunity.”

## BAD NEWS

**Project Delays** are not uncommon, but my Energy Imps are the bearers of delays to oil and gas projects and to wind projects. **Oil & Gas** have had a double whammy as we learn that, first, Jersey Oil and Gas, Serica Energy and Neo Energy stall on Buchan field until after July 4 because of fears over Labour’s plans for a windfall tax. According to *The Times*, the £900 million Buchan project was due to produce its first oil in 2026 and turn out about 35,000 barrels of oil equivalent per day at its peak. The three companies are redeveloping the oilfield, have pushed back a final investment decision until later this year which also delays first production until late 2027.



Under current tax rules, there is no material change in the valuation of the project as a result of the later first production date. Offshore Energy UK, the industry body, reportedly claim that raising the windfall tax from 75% to 78% and “end loopholes” threatened by Labour has led to uncertainty among energy companies that the party may remove “critical” investment allowances. This is part of what the Scottish Nationalists claim would lead to 100,000 job losses in Scotland and fuels their campaign to leave the end the United Kingdom.

Elsewhere, a ruling in the **UK Supreme Court** threatens all new North Sea projects. A case was brought against Surrey County council which had approved six oil wells at Horse Hill, north of Gatwick. The Council had considered the direct environmental impact of digging the wells before granting permission, but the Court ruled that it should also have considered the indirect emissions produced when oil from the site

was burnt. Eco activists claim the ruling sets a precedent that would make it harder to approve other fossil fuel projects. This may be doubtful as Planning Authorities could consider the impact but reject the argument on a variety of grounds. It does add yet another layer of delay that can be used to frustrate project decisions. In this particular case, it seems NIMBYISM not climate health was the underlying cause of the action.



Image: Liang Wendong Getty Images

As if these problems for fossil fuel projects was not enough, the new CEO of BP has halted bidding on new **offshore wind projects** to simplify and cut costs. *Murray Auchincloss*, the chief executive, has set out plans to save at least \$2 billion in costs by the end of 2026, as he tries to close the valuation gap with peers in the oil and gas sector. BP is refocusing on assets in the Gulf of Mexico and the US Permian basin, where it already has a large presence. *The Times* reported that BP is

still considering biofuels investments and other lower-carbon businesses that generate good near-term return. It acquired a 50% stake in a \$1.4 billion Brazilian sugar and ethanol joint venture from Bunge, the grain trader.

**Horizon Inquiry** is more horror story than simple bad news. Some readers may recall earlier reports of the disastrous IT project that resulted in nearly 1000 sub-postmasters being falsely accused of fraud and theft, and the large numbers of convictions that followed. There are two main issues for project people: first, why were there no whistle blowers raising performance issues; second, how did project sponsors and others responsible for project governance fail to react to significant numbers of claims that the software was faulty? If you are in UK, you can follow the Inquiry live on TV. The legal eagles are hard at it trying to lay blame and it is an unedifying spectacle all round with senior managers having severe recall problems or simply denying the problems. There are major project issues involved, not least aspects of professionalism.

## POLITICS

Few people have identified the upcoming **General Election** as a programme. This may be due to the short flash to bang timescale, but all the major political parties have an overall campaign and a series of related but independent projects in each constituency, grouped regionally and nationally. The stakeholder engagement aspects are all important and the stakes are high. The results will be in as this report hits the streets and the post project reviews will be available for my next report.

One interesting report centered on the cost of converting to a **Net Zero Economy**. The Labour party is reported as estimating it will cost “hundreds of billions” to achieve this by 2050. Their funding plans allocated £28 billion annually to achieve this but this has been revised to £4.7 billion. The National Infrastructure Commission has previously estimated that total public and private investment of about £70 billion a year in the next two decades is likely to be needed to hit net zero and regeneration goals. Like most political parties, Labour expect private industry to pay for most of this but

have yet to achieve the necessary expansion of the economy that will be essential if these ambitious plans are to be achieved.

## **CLOSING REMARKS**

**Smells of times past.** I bring you with a report of a successful research project. Researchers at University College London, a Russell Group university with which I have some connections, are building a library to recreate and archive aromas deemed culturally significant in British life. Dr Cecilia Bembibre and her team specialise in “olfactory heritage” which involves molecular analysis of odours to reproduce them. She is seeking help from the British public to build an inventory of British smells, and the memories and stories behind them.

As The Times waggishly reports, a bottle in Dr Bembibre’s lab contains the library at St Paul’s Cathedral, all old books and leather chairs. More pleasing, perhaps, than one recreated by a Dutch colleague: the changing room of her country’s winning 1988 European Championship side. Apparently, there is something attractive in the smell of used socks in the morning. That stale smell. Smells like...victory. Perhaps the English Men’s football and T20 Cricket teams should take note.

And finally, a couple of seasonal notes about **rewilding successes** in Sussex. The white stork (*Ciconia Ciconia*) is UK’s largest bird and for more than 600 years, a breeding population is flourishing in deepest Sussex. Stork chicks are hatching at Knepp Farm. Ornithologists hope that more than 40 young birds will fledge shortly on the estate .



Image: Times photographer Jack Hill

Hunting and habitat loss led to the extinction of the species. For the storks to breed requires the construction of the conditions that would allow it to build nests and establish free-living colonies. Once a certain population reaches a critical mass, then it has a chance of reproducing and remaining. Storks bred at Knepp for the first time some four years ago. Before that, the last record of a wild white stork hatching in UK dated back to 1416, a year after the Battle of Agincourt, when a pair nested on the roof of St Giles’ Cathedral in Edinburgh. In 2020, four chicks fledged at Knepp, the best known rewilding site in Britain. In 2021 there were 15, in 2022 another 18 fledged, and last year 26 survived.



The rewilding movement in Sussex is not confined to Knepp although the support of owners Sir Charles Burrell and Isabella Tree is important. Others are trying to re-establish local environments that will encourage a wide range of species that were once endemic but have been lost, mainly due to habitat degradation. An example is a campaign to reintroduce the Red Backed Shrike, or Butcher Bird. This and the white stork reintroduction is part of a long term plan to create a 100-mile wildlife corridor from Ashdown Forest to the sea. Locally, we have a similar corridor emerging to link parts of the

New Forrest to Salisbury Plain. This corridor is aimed at helping the Stone Curlew, a very rare ground nesting bird.

With all the successes such schemes are having, it might be worth recalling the negative aspects. Shepherds (no relation) in Switzerland and northern Italy are complaining about the reintroduction of wolves while in Paris a woman was attacked by wolves. Who knew there were wolves in Paris?

## 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 a past Chair of the ISO committee developing new international standards for Project Management and for Program/Portfolio Management. He was 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).