

UK Project Management Round Upⁱ



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INTRODUCTION

Our esteemed Editor may have reminded you that this is our 144th edition, something to celebrate, I hope you agree. This is my 138th report and I had the dubious privilege of writing the only Regional Report in that first edition twelve years. I am very glad to say that many of the other contributors are still contributing, and we have been joined by an interesting bunch to make this still one of the most read non-academic project management journals on line.

This is supposed to be the so-called Silly Season where the respected members of the Fifth Estate scramble for any stories to fill their pages. You can tell this is an antediluvian expression as few have pages. My Technology Imp informs me that in these modern times, the term is most strongly associated with bloggers, hacktivists, and media outlets that operate outside the mainstream. I'm not entirely clear where this leaves me but there is a lot of real activity in the project world to report.

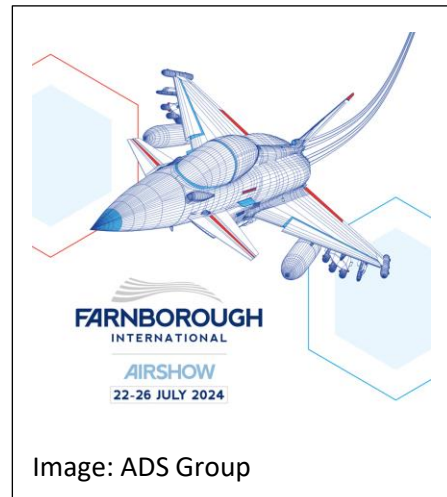
First up is the Good News section with the outcome of one major program to record, some major events either under way or completed; then we comment on some Bad News, mainly decision making and Horizon, before covering the less easy to define stuff about the project world. Finally, we end this report with news of some local projects.

GOOD NEWS

The best news I saw last month was the announcement of this year's PMI Lifetime Achievement Award to Professor *Andrew Davies*. Already recognised for his outstanding short book, *Projects: A Very Short Introduction*, (Oxford University Press, 2017), he received the prestigious David I. Cleland Literature Award from PMI. Needless to say, he has an outstanding record of research on project related topics.

The next best news was the end of the General Election. I was not so interested in the result as in the competing programmes conducted by the various political parties. The cynics out there will say the unedifying spectacle of stakeholder manipulation had the expected outcome and it all gives competitive project management a bad name. Fortunately, none of the protagonists claimed they employed project management approaches. I'll come back to the Post Election implications in a later section.

There have been any number of high profile events that depend on good planning and management, thus qualifying as projects. Take for, example, Farnborough, or as it is properly called the Farnborough International Airshow (FIA2024) which closed at the end of the month. This was its 45th edition and depending on which trade paper you read was either a howling success with deals worth £81.5bn agreed and a total of 260 commercial aircraft orders made in four days. The UK's was apparently some £13bn. Other press reports claim this to be "relatively modest" compared with a rush of post-pandemic deals at the Paris Airshow last year. As aircraft construction is multinational, it is probably better to consider major producer order books. A last minute order from Saudi Arabian discount carrier Flynas gave Airbus a healthier total than arch-rival Boeing with 164 aircraft orders against 96 firm orders and 22 options. Results were generally down on the 2023 Paris Show which enjoyed a post lock down boom.



The most high profile event this year can only be the Olympic Games taking place in Paris as I write. Overall organisation and management is a French responsibility but most participating countries will have planned the development and training of their athletes as a project. In UK, we tend to benefit from some national funding doled out by UK Sport and they demand detailed plans with well-defined objectives. Benefits management is a key component, a lesson learned at the 2012 Olympics. It will be interesting to see how the plans stand up to post project evaluation.

BAD NEWS

➤ **Horizon.** Top of the bad news list is the continuing saga of Horizon, the failed IT system that resulted in the best part of 1000 miscarriages of justice. This is dragging through a formal Inquiry, televised daily. We have heard that Fujitsu’s former CEO saw no “flashing red lights” despite warnings from multiple sources. An expert witness in the prosecution of 555 sub-post masters claimed the software worked but he did not know the “gory details of remote access. For outsiders, all this seems preposterous, as we would expect exhaustive testing. How could project managers not be aware of something like this and did the large number of prosecutions alert someone to a potential “issue”?

NOT SURE NEWS

➤ **Business Cases.** There has been an outbreak of common sense in the ranks of senior management, it seems. First comes news that the “Venice of Britain” project has been abandoned. The £2.3 billion plan to develop a new town on the edge of the



Fawley Waterside (Artist’s Impression) Image: Business Hampshire

New Forest National Park with some 1,500 homes, many alongside a canal, a hotel, school and a marina. Had the plans succeeded the more than 2,000 jobs would have created.

Confirming that the plans had been withdrawn, on the grounds of financial

viability, the company said a new future for the site will need to be determined. The coastal site was home to a disused power station which was built in the 60s and decommissioned in 2013, after 40 years of operation.

➤ **HS2 Platforms.** Just when you thought HS2 was no longer an issue, up pops

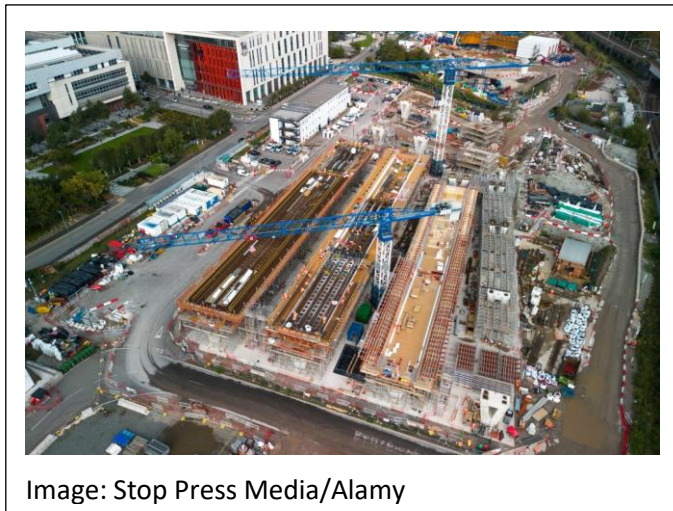


Image: Stop Press Media/Alamy

another case. This one is not a horror story, more one of common sense. The story revolves around Curzon Street station (Left) in Birmingham. It was planned that seven platforms would be built but the last Government cancelled the northern extension, rendering the platforms redundant. As can be seen work was well underway when the cancellation was announced. The decision was taken to continue the build as it would have been too

expensive to replan and to cancel existing contracts. A rail construction expert said “that it actually makes sense to carry on as planned. Not only would starting from scratch cost vast amounts of money but also having the extra platforms does future-proof it and leave scope to expand HS2, or other rail services into the station.”

➤ **Buckingham Palace Reservicing programme.** This 10 year programme started in 2017 to update the plumbing, pipes, wires and heating, some of which date from the 1940s and 1950s. The National Audit Office (NAO) Value for Money report describes the overall objective as mitigate the real risk of operational failure within the Palace through reservicing to deliver an enduring building infrastructure with a life expectancy of 50 years. The NAO conclusion is that the Palace and The Household have managed the £369 million programme well and demonstrated good practice in a number of areas. It had clear objectives and a budget that reflected the risk of undertaking a heritage programme. There are some concerns that the backloading of work on to the last two years and the limited remaining unallocated contingency poses some risk. Despite these favourable views, there are reports that there is a 78% overspend on the budget, due in large part by the discovery of very large volumes of asbestos and a need to remove some 3.5 km of dangerous vulcanised cabling .

POST ELECTION MATTERS

We are in the middle of the usual post election activities as the incoming administration tries to trash the outgoing bunch on the grounds that the new-commers are inheriting a major mess. This is a well-documented game and one that has enlightened the GBP (Great British Public) since at least 1982. Despite these petty diversions, incoming administration do inherit a number of projects for which decisions need to be taken. The ones in the headlines include:

- **Drax Biomass Power Subsidies.** Without extensions to the subsidies which are due to end in 2027, Drax will be unable to invest the £billions needed to build and operate carbon capture and storage facilities for its emissions. This is an issue since Drax provides about 4% of UK electricity and without their contribution, there is a substantial deficit in supply over the period 20-27 – 2030 when other sources of supply are expected to come on-line. This will not be new nuclear in any of its potential forms as none will be completed before 2029 at the earliest.
- **Dogger Bank South.** Applications have gone out for infrastructure planning of this new wind farm. The stumbling block seems to be how to bring the energy ashore with planning problems over siting the link between offshore cabling from the two projects (South East and South West) to join up with the National Grid.
- **Lower Thames Crossing.** Our esteemed Leader (OEL) has received a snotogram from five former Transport Ministers who are beating the incomers with the well-known cry that our “inability to deliver infrastructure at pace is holding our nation back”. Well we all know that and we also know that the planning system is the root cause. The cross party (if they were still supporting a party at all) bunch are demanding instant decisions on a £9 billion project that has been the subject of innumerable delays since it first appeared in 2009, the latest of which is a 6 month deferral for, would you believe, the General Election! The latest bunch claimed in their election promises to speed up decision making on transport projects by 25% and 20% cheaper. Neat trick!

PROFESSIONAL SOCIETIES



Carolyn Brown

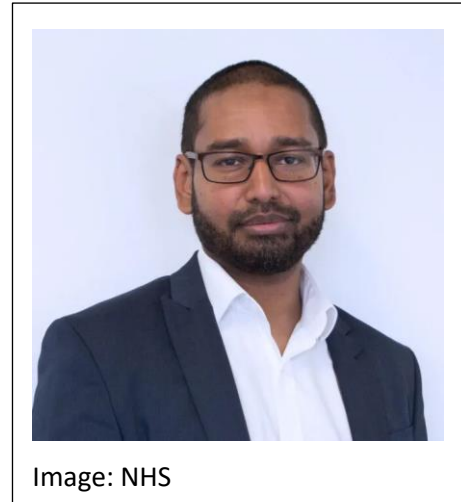
Image: BMA

APM have announced the appointment of a new External Trustee, *Carolyn Brown* as a new member of its Board of Trustees. Currently Chief Information Officer (CIO) with the British Medical Association (BMA) where her role is to look after the digital and technology remit across the BMA, which includes everything from security, development, business intelligence etc. It's quite an expansive role, according to Ms Brown, but, “just relating it back to APM, there's not a day that goes by where we don't talk about projects, so it's part and parcel of what I have done for most of my career”. She joins the new President **Dr**

Yvonne Thompson CBE who took up her post in July.

APM also announced that **Hassan Chaudhury** is the latest individual to receive an Honorary Fellowship. The APM Honorary Fellowship is awarded to individuals in recognition of their exceptional, demonstrable, and significant contributions to the project profession.

Hassan's background is in frontline social work, NHS informatics, and public health. He later co-founded Health iQ – an award-winning agency focusing on real world evidence - and held Chief Information Officer and Chief Commercial Officer positions before its acquisition and his exit in 2019. He later worked for UK Government where he developed the national offers for digital health before joining Health Data Research UK, UCL, and King's College London.

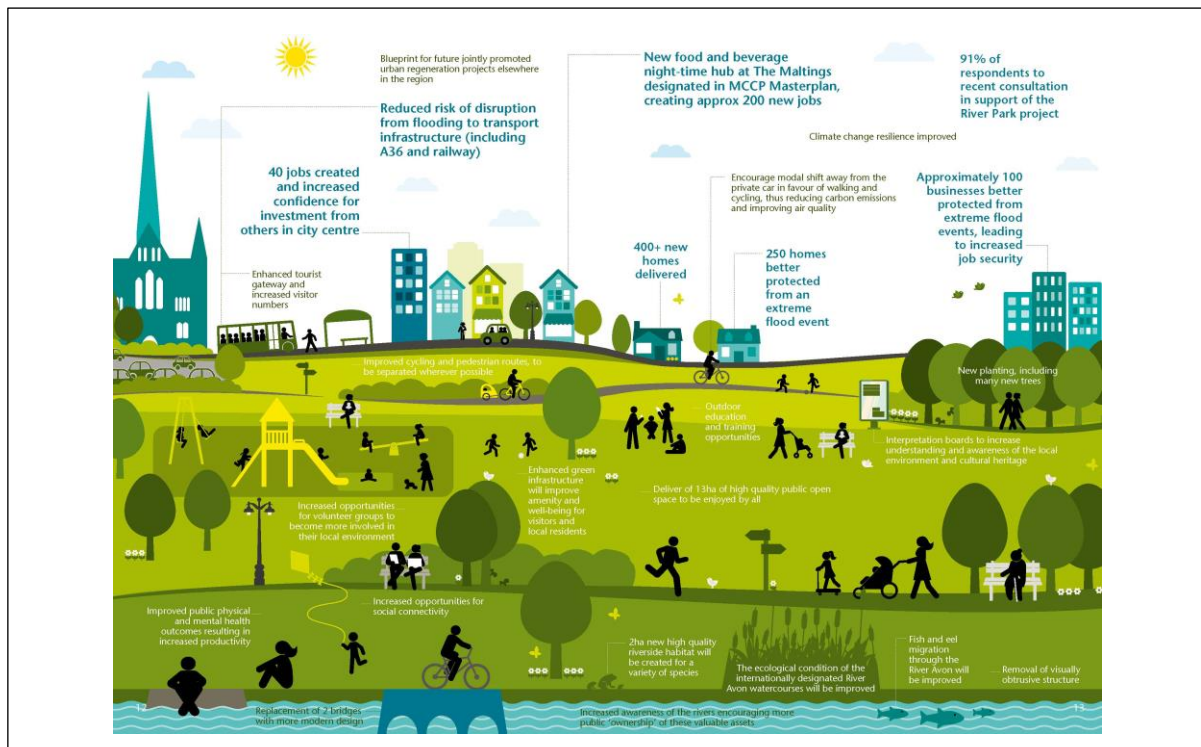


LOCAL PROJECTS

These are really part of the Good News section but seemed a little indulgent but, hey, this is Summer!

Stonehenge Preparation On the Unclassified part of this report, I noted the Stonehenge Tunnel project. Linked to that is a the A360 wiring project where a major trunk road leading from the northern outskirts of Salisbury to the A303 (of ill repute) and Stonehenge itself was closed for what seemed like months while Scottish and Southern Electricity Networks (SSEN) installed high-voltage cabling under the road between the Avenue and the Longbarrow roundabout. The good news is the road reopened a week early.

Salisbury River Park Phase 1



Salisbury Museum opened their three new galleries to the public for the first time as on 13 July – the culmination of a £5.1m project: *Past Forward*. The project was supported by the National Lottery Heritage Fund and resulted in the restoration of the beautiful Grade I listed building which houses the Museum. The two year project; created a more accessible visitor experience, new venue hire and education spaces, and redisplaying the galleries with stories and objects from Salisbury and its community's history. Retaining old favourites such as the Salisbury Giant and Hobnob, work has been coordinated with local community groups, museum research groups and schools to co-curate displays. New displays include 1912 Scout Car a brand new Natural History Gallery.

WILDLIFE PROJECTS

➤ Ospreys. Real ones, not the well-known Welsh rugby club and these started in Scotland! Regular readers will know there are numerous wildlife projects to reintroduce lost species or to support those struggling to establish themselves. There

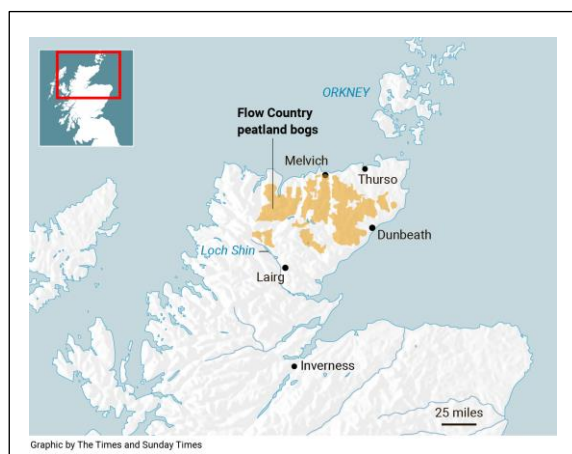


are many such projects supporting Ospreys which was the first to report successes so they tend to only attract local attention. However, an unusual event occurred in Scotland when two very young Osprey chicks were relocated to Spain. This is a reversal of the original Osprey Project which imported birds to help build the local population.

Wildlife experts noted the chicks struggling for food. Louis, the father, seemed to be “off his game” according to *George Anderson*, the Woodland Trust spokesperson. Louis could be ill or suffering age-related effects. This is Louis and mate Dorcha which have already raised a clutch of 3 eggs with 2 fledging. “Bad weather is likely part of the problem and lots of nests appear to have had a poor year, but we think there is something not right about Louis”.

The chicks were removed from the nest at the beginning of July and are now in the Valencian. The transfer has been supported by the Roy Dennis Wildlife Foundation as part of a project to reintroduce the birds to the eastern part of Spain. The project is based in the Pego-Oliva Marsh Natural Park, near the town of Playa Santa Ana.

➤ **Scottish Bog.** This is not what you may think...! I refer to the successful outcome of a long running conservation programme to preserve what are known as the Flows. The Flow Country in northern Scotland has achieved UNESCO World Heritage site. The site is a peat bog covering some 1,500 square miles and stores about 400 million tons of carbon. It is also home to golden eagles (I saw my first one there about 20 years ago), red throated divers and many other species.



➤ **Norfolk Hawkers.** Again, not what you might think – these hawkers are not door to door sellers of poor quality items (in England) or stall operators with basic business skills (Singapore) – no, they are a type of dragonfly and a rather plain one at that. The Norfolk Hawker became extinct in the Cambridgeshire Fens in the 19th



Image: British Dragonfly Society

Century 1893 and its breeding sites confined to the east of Norfolk and Suffolk. Since 1990 the Hawker spread westward and there have been sightings and egg-laying in Lancashire, South Devon, Dorset and Sussex. The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds reports sightings at 21 of its reserves, up from 11 in 2020. In its larval form, the Hawker spends several years so it needs water, good clean water, particularly in marshy ditches. The increased range seems to be due to better wetland habitats and good ditch maintenance. While this expansion is good news, entomologists have not established whether it

is coming from Norfolk or from mainland Europe. Who knew dragonflies can fly across the Channel!

CLOSING REMARKS

PM Vocabulary. This is a new section! If, like me, you read or write project reports, the language you use is important for all sorts of reasons. Perhaps the most important is to assure your readers that you command language so that your communication is effective, concise and unambiguous. There is some very good advice in Lewis Carroll's *Alice In Wonderland* and what she found there where Humpty Dumpty explains word choice to the heroine (see p82 of the standard edition). What he did not say was that there are some words you should not choose and I want to share some of these with you. I'll start with *advancement* and *on going*. If you have similar *bête-noirs*, please let me know and I'll add them to the list.

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.

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