

UK Project Management Round Up



By Dr Miles Shepherd

*Executive Advisor & International Correspondent
Salisbury, England, UK*

INTRODUCTION

The long, cool and usually wet (but not this year) British Summer is officially over as we had our final Public Holiday at the end of August. Events big and small have taken place at home and abroad so the Great British Public have been well entertained. After the press-fest that was the General Election, matters are settling down and decisions affecting the project world are being taken.

The other major attraction to keep us on the edge of our seats is the party conferences, I doubt that we will learn anything new, but it is always interesting to see how those with their snouts newly in the trough will justify their pet schemes. Rest assured, though, should anything of project interest come up, you will see it here.

GOOD NEWS

Eastern Green Link 2. There is always good news out there but sometimes you have to look pretty hard and this month is no exception. Regular readers will no doubt recall previous stories about energy transfer schemes. These are aimed at transferring industrial levels of power from their generating sources to locations where the power can be fed into the National Grid. We have reported schemes covering oil, gas (of various types) and electricity. Some link up UK to European sources such as France (electricity) and Denmark (oil and a new one for electricity) but a new project has just been approved to join Peterhead, near Aberdeen, and Bridlington in East Yorkshire. Designed to transfer renewable energy between Scotland and England, most of the 310 miles of cabling will be laid under the North



Sea. The cable will be underground from where it comes ashore and will connect to Drax, the vast power generator near Selby in North Yorkshire. The £3.4 billion package of funding is described as the largest investment in UK network infrastructure and will be the longest subsea cable in Britain, the builders expect inflation to push the full cost towards £4.3 billion. It is expected that thousands of jobs will be created during the construction phase. Work on laying the land-based section is scheduled to start next year with the subsea elements following in 2028, and first transmission in 2029.

Silent Hangar. Under a new £20 million contract issued by the Ministry of Defence, QinetiQ will build a radio frequency, anti-jamming test facility at the Boscombe Down site in Wiltshire.

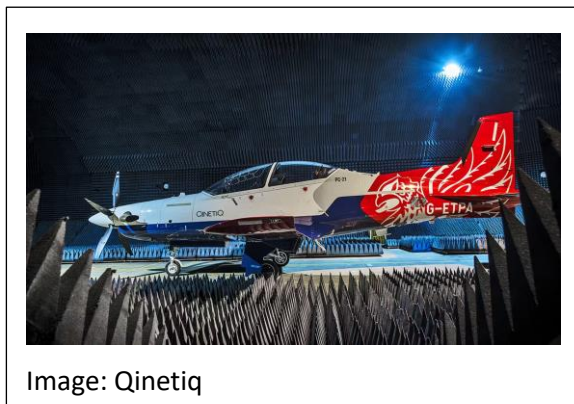


Image: Qinetiq

This 'silent hangar' will be large enough to fit some of the biggest military assets, including Protector drones, Chinook helicopters, and F-35 fighter jets – a far greater capacity than existing UK facilities.

Due to open in 2026, the anechoic hangar creates the perfect environment to test the integrity of the UK's military equipment, not just aircraft. The hangar also prevents testing from affecting other users, such as

the emergency services and air traffic control.

GPS jamming or spoofing GPS signals is increasingly used during warfare to disrupt airborne vehicles or critical economic, defence and strategic activities. Experiences in Ukraine have demonstrated the need for increased battlefield resilience. Earlier this year, it was reported that Russia had been jamming the GPS systems of thousands of flights to and from Europe since around August 2023, including a flight taking the then Secretary of State for Defence.

Planning Regulations: The problems caused by our highly restrictive planning laws is something that politicians of all stripes wail about but as soon as someone makes a suggestion to get out of the difficulties, local NIMBYs stymie the deal. A classic example is Thames Water's proposal to build a reservoir in the Vale of the White Horse. Thames Water has a poor reputation so in some ways, it is not surprising that local NIMBYs have blocked planning permission. This will be fine until these very same self-style ecowarriors run out of water. The proposed reservoir is needed, according to Thames Water, because of the sharp increase in population in southern England.

While some locals are strongly opposed to any form of change, there is growing awareness that climate change will increase pressure to respond. The National Infrastructure Commission (NIC) has calculated that some 4 billion extra litres a day

will be needed by 2050. This lift requires investment of around £20 Billion. NIC also reports that 1.3 billion litres would come from new reservoirs but, and it is a big but, leaks must be fixed and demand reduced. While some objectors just can't cope with change, many do not trust the water supply companies. However, research by NIC has shown that the water companies are on schedule to halve leaks by 2050. While the planning process is clearly dysfunctional, for the most part it works, although it imposes severe delays, particularly for infrastructure projects. There is evidence to show that planners are at last beginning to take climate change into their calculations. So there is hope that the 9 major reservoirs proposed by the water companies may join the Havant Thicket Reservoir.

NOT SO GOOD NEWS

Finance Problems. We all know that money makes the world go round and it is also quite handy for funding projects so the news over the last few weeks of problems in the alternative energy sector come as a blow (sorry!). First, came news that **The Renewables Infrastructure Group** (TRIG) has suffered a 7% generation reduction, due mainly to wind farm failures and low energy prices. This has resulted in 3% reduction in net asset value which in turn impacts on their ability to raise funds for further projects.

This came hard on the heels of **Orsted's** news that delays in wind farm developments in USA have forced a \$US 575 million write off in impairment costs. Orsted own and operate Hornsea Two the world's largest off shore wind farm. It has also abandoned a major project in Sweden and it has "de-prioritised" green fuels projects.

Rolls Royce are also seeking additional funding for its small modular reactor (SMR) business. They have already attracted £280 Billion from investors in exchange for a 30% stake in the business and £210 Billion from the Government. Decisions on a reduced short list of preferred bidders are due to be announced later this month.

Better Project Finance. My Westminster Imp tells me there is somewhat better financial news for UK renewable energy firms as the Government has dropped an additional half billion into State subsidies for the annual auction with about £1.1 Billion going towards new off-shore wind farms. Let's hope that the auction attracts some bids – none were received last year as the begging bowl was left very low on contributions.

Skills Shortage. This is a topic that raises its head all too frequently. In UK, the Association for Project Management (APM) has raised this with successive Governments and with employers in efforts to improve recruitment into project related roles and to foster training. Their Degree Level Apprenticeships have proved very attractive and other schemes also help develop new entrants. However, the wider skills shortages continue to raise concern in infrastructure programmes.

Project Delays. Following on from skills shortages, we also have facilities shortages. It seems that there is a major problem at Royal Naval Dockyards where a lack of available docks has prevented the deployment of the new Astute Class hunter killer submarines. A defence source was reported in The Times stating that other submarines were clocking progress, “The priority is the continuous at-sea deterrent, so when there is a conflict between Astute and Vanguard-class work, it goes to the bomber. This is further challenged by visiting boats who also use the dockyard facilities.”



NOT ALL BAD NEWS



At first sight, you might think the testing of the Rocket Factory Augsburg (RFA) One rocket exploded in a ball of flames at SaxaVord Spaceport . You may recall earlier reports celebrating the site opening as western Europe’s first fully licensed vertical port, on the Lamba Ness peninsula.

SaxaVord Spaceport’s chief executive officer, Frank Strang

remained upbeat about the incident. “I am delighted that all the protocols and procedures worked,” he said on Tuesday. “The pad performed as it was supposed to. RFA will conduct their investigation into what the problem was; they will fix it and then we will carry on.”

A spokesman said: “This was a test, and test campaigns are designed to identify issues prior to the next stage. We will work with RFA to understand and learn from the causes and support them as they move forward to the next phase of their preparations.”

So, onward and upwards - literally!

CLOSING REMARKS

➤ **Signs Of Things To Come?** A couple of things caught my eye since our last edition. The first is the report that a software provider has been fined £6m after a

ransomware attack on the National Health Service. What struck me was that this is a provisional fine, i.e. there could be more to follow. From a project point of view, this raises the major point of managing your data properly. Attacks on NHS and the like hit the headlines but equally important are loss or compromise of project data that can have very serious repercussions. The other point is responsibility for making good defects.

➤ **Payback time?** Regular readers will recall the seemingly endless problems with the Queen Elizabeth Class aircraft carriers. Now a former head of the Royal Navy has suggested that the Government should claw back the cost of these repairs. Time to call in the contract lawyers?

➤ **Rewilding.** My green Imp has returned hot foot from Iberia where Portugal's University of Evora and Madrid's National Museum of Natural Sciences in Madrid have drawn up a list of criteria to identify how much land in Europe could be rewilded. One of the top nations turns out to be Scotland but there is no suitable land in Wales, while in England only some 158 hectares in Northumberland has been identified which must come as a major blow to the Knepp Estate in West Sussex home of one of England's best known rewilding project. According to Rewilding Britain, there are about 1,000 rewilding schemes, ranging from Lamlash Bay on the Isle of Arran, where fishing is banned to protect maerl beds (a rare pink seaweed) — to Doddington Hall near Lincoln, which is turning former farmland over to wood pasture and wetland. Regular readers may recall the buffalo reintroduction project in Kent and there are many avian projects re-establishing birds from eagles to white storks.

➤ **Give way to Hedgehogs.** Not quite rewilding but an urban renewal project is under way in London of all places. Hedgehogs are a dwindling breed all over UK but in Kingston in southwest London, they are taking steps to protect hedgehogs crossing the road. They have taken the simple step of installing signs warning drivers that hedgehogs cross the Old Malden Road, hopefully improving H&S for the local population which is estimated at around 100 hogs. This sign is one of the new simplified road signs commissioned by the previous administration. And before you ask, the gentleman in the picture is not about to boil the hedgehog he seems to be holding.



➤ **Nature's Project Managers.** Beavers are sometimes called nature's project managers as they construct dams and generally alter their environment for their benefit. These furry critters are attracting attention here in UK for two reasons. First comes sightings of juvenile beavers, or kits, born in the wild. The most recent sightings took place in London, the first in more than 400 years. Spotted at a site in Ealing

where they were introduced last year as part of a project to help nature diversity, this “happy event” shows the rodents are happy with their new home according to the Reserve staff.

This sighting is not unique. Beavers were born in other enclosures from the Wallington Estate, in Northumberland, on rivers in Canterbury, Kent, and at the Cairngorms, in the Highlands. There are more than 1,000 beavers in Scotland on sites in Speyside, Tayside, on the Forth, in Knapdale and Loch Lomond. There is a single English population on the River Otter in Devon, where escapees were given permission to stay. There is now pressure from the powerful Wildlife Trusts, an umbrella group of 46 conservation charities, to release beavers into the wild and not only into fenced enclosures in England and Wales. They also want the hundreds of wild beavers living “illegally” in English rivers to be legalised! Naturally, they are calling on the Government to fund this latest batch of illegal migrant.

➤ **Dormice Protection.** If you travel on the roads of Kent, you may have pondered the severity of traffic near Junction 5 of the M2 motorway. So, too have the road planners and they came up with a scheme for a new roundabout costing a cool £5.8 million. As they were doing advance site clearance, workers discovered a dormouse nest. As the image (right) shows, these are not easy to spot but workers managed to do it. This is now a problem as the species is endangered and special licences are needed to alter to location of a nest. Timing of action is also an issue as the dormouse is active usually between April and early October



And so ends another month in the project world in UK. I have been disappointed that no one has added any word to my cancelled list so I will just have to add to it myself.

About the Author



Dr. 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 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.