

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



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### **INTRODUCTION**

At this time of the year, life generally becomes less hectic as the supply of real news dries up as the nation moves towards the peak holiday period. This means major news revolves around social events such as Henley Royal Regatta, Wimbledon and Royal Ascot. Not so this year! Perhaps it is the heat (we have been through the hottest June on record) but there seems to be an unusually interesting crop of stories as I hope you enjoy those that caught my eye this month.

### **GOOD NEWS**

We have dual interests in funding government projects. On the one hand, as Project Managers, we look forward to secure funding for the projects we manage and on the other, we are conscious that it is our own money we are spending. So, a major event in our lives is formal publication of Government spending plans, in this case a long-awaited Spending Review. The result of some acrimonious negotiations between the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Rachel Reeves MP, and the spending departments, which usually claim any reduction in funding would have unspeakable consequences.

Be that as it may, the key project related points to emerge are:

Defence spending will rise to 2.5 per cent of GDP by 2027 – funded by cuts to international aid. This represents an increase of about £11 billion across the review period. This includes £4.5 billion for munitions and £6 billion for nuclear submarines.

Affordable and social housing gets £39 billion building council and social homes to rent over the next decade. This money is about £3.9 billion a year and is significantly more than the £2.3 billion spent by the last government on a similar programme. Homes England gets £10 billion to help with private investment in housebuilding.

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Energy and net zero did pretty well as will be seen later. The headlines are £14 billion to fund the Sizewell C nuclear power station, and another £2.5 billion to develop a new generation of smaller modular reactors. Carbon-capture and storage projects in Scotland and the east of England also receive funding, we have previously reported on both these projects. There is a lot of news about Sizewell C which we will cover next month.

**National Memorial to Queen Elizabeth.** A national competition to design a memorial to the late Queen Elizabeth II has been won by Foster + Partners. It is expected to include a statue of the Queen on horseback alongside the Mall. Another statue of her walking arm-in-arm with Prince Philip. The project includes a new Prince Philip Gate in St James's Park and a translucent bridge inspired by the late Queen's wedding tiara.



Artist's impression of QEII memorial

Image: FOSTER + PARTNERS/PA

Other features include a wind sculpture intended to “define a space for reflection and shared experience”, and recordings of the Queen’s voice will be “ever present through audio installations”. Funding provision between £23 million and £46 million has been earmarked for the project,

Other good news concerns funding (£15 billion) for new transport projects in the north of England, plans by Amazon to invest £40 billion in UK over the next 3 years as the firm builds four robotic fulfilment centres and refurbishes Bray Film Studios in Berkshire.

## NOT SO GOOD NEWS

**Funding Issues.** In its ever-responsible pursuit of the extra £ for pet projects comes forecasts that cuts to the foreign aid budget will affect some of the most significant overseas projects, including a UK project that played a key role in halting the worst Ebola outbreak in Africa in 20 years. TDDAP (Tackling Deadly Diseases in Africa Programme) was a £200 million project aimed at detecting and controlling potential epidemics by training local health officials. It was so successful that the outbreak was declared over in just two months. the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) is currently in discussions on scaling back the project.

**High Speed 2 (HS2).** This is a subject that never seems to go away and last month saw the publication of a major report on the planning and execution of this mega project. There is too much to cover this month so we will hold it over for next month's issue.

**Road to Nowhere.** This is about post-project review and the power of positive thinking. Lincolnshire County Council. The project began in 2022 and was completed



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Spalding's Bridge to Nowhere

Image BAV Media

in 2024. The plan was to link the northern and southern sections of the £110m Spalding relief road. The northern section and the bridge were completed in 2024 but the money the middle and southern sections of the road had not been secured. In common with many local government major programmes, planning is done by project and funding for the complete

programme not allocated until nearer start time. Much of the angst expressed by local politician is party politics and no doubt factors such as spiralling costs and COVID have contributed to the problem but it will be interesting to see how this is resolved.

**Spending Review.** This is a tricky one to report as Governmental Plans are necessarily broad brush affairs, but the much anticipated Spending Review set out strategy for many Departments and has a notable impact on programmes. Project Managers will be either greatly encouraged if their sector is favoured, troubled if the magic money tree fails to deliver. As noted above, the Overseas Aid budget took a hit



earlier in the year but others including housing and the Home Office took significant hits. Both are big users of projects.

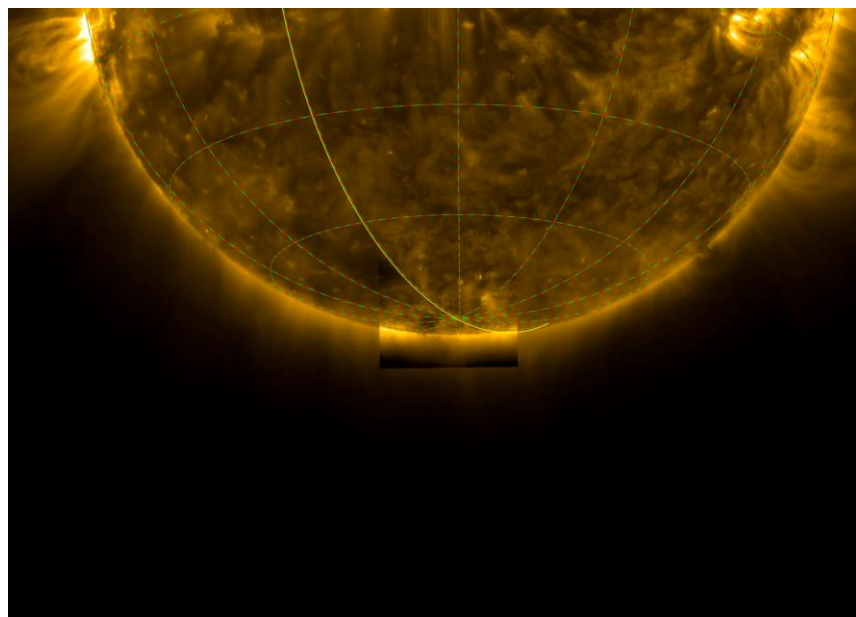
**Fall of the Mighty.** Just as you might be thinking that everything was done and dusted for Government spending plans, an almighty upset occurred. As the month ended, the Prime Minister was forced to concede on the Disability Reform Bill. The original aim had been to reduce the spend on welfare overall but this part of a complex set of changes to the welfare system was seen by many as having a major impact on disabled people. Some believe that the Act would “result in very serious breaches” of international human rights law. This was the view of Jamie Burton KC of Doughty Street Chambers who stated that the Government set out “aggressive measures” that would “inevitably result in very serious breaches of the UK’s obligations” under the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. As a result, of this and a rebellion by large numbers of Labour Members of Parliament, major concessions were made to the scale of cuts. This will have a major impact on Government funding and will make a mess of the plans in the Spending Review. It is unclear how the increased in defence spending, improving the National Health Service and policing will be impacted.

## OTHER PROJECT NEWS

**Solar Orbiter.** This is a project which cost about £1.3 billion, was built in Stevenage assembled by Airbus. It was launched by the European Space Agency (ESA) and Nasa in 2020. ESA has released spectacular images of the southern polar region of the Sun, an area never before seen by mankind.

The images should help scientists understand how the Sun cycles. It is well known that the sun swings between periods of intense storms and quiet times.

Understanding how this works is important, as solar activity affects satellite communication and can knock out terrestrial power systems.



Sun's South Pole

Image: ESA

**Solar Rail Stations.** No, not linked to the previous snippet! My transport imp tells me that the Rail Minister has announced a 14-year fixed-price deal to buy enough electricity to power all 20 Network Rail-managed stations. This covers the mainline stations in London and all the major stations at Birmingham, Manchester, Glasgow, Edinburgh, Leeds and Bristol. The deal is seen as an enabler to increase the use of renewable energy on electrified train lines as the industry is incrementally renationalised to create Great British Railways (GBR).

## **CLOSING REMARKS**

**Importance of Homework.** Previous reports of the funding for the Lower Thames Crossing have appeared here several times so it comes as a surprise that a Treasury Minister was unable to tell a media audience where it is being built and how much it is expected to cost. Little wonder the Government has funding issues if they can't keep track of a £590 million infrastructure project! Our reports should perhaps be in ministerial briefing packs!

**Pet Hates.** Several issue ago, I bemoaned the use of several words which I felt were meaningless in a project context (and actually in everyday usage), so I was not surprised to learn that an executive with a telecommunications firm was sacked after he complained, vociferously according to the report my legal imp brought to my attention. Terms such as "growth mindset" and "personal development planning" invoked his ire. For me, its words like "on-going" that get my goat but reports in Forbes claim that America's most hated office jargon were "synergy", "teamwork" and "touch base". Who likes "raising the bar" and "circle back"? Let me know your favourite hated words.

**Alarming Developments.** I hesitate to report a project that has resulted in the birth of mice with two fathers. The matriarchy has long claimed that males were not necessary for reproduction but it seems like the boot is on the – er – other parts of the anatomy.

**Problem Drinking.** The latest rider to the dominance of Artificial Intelligence or AI and the threat to our jobs comes from an unexpected direction. AI has to be trained (as do we mere mortals) but they are trained on incredible amounts of data which needs to be stored in data centres. Now the secret is out – these data centres are drinkers, and they suck up scarce water supplies. So perhaps we need to oppose new reservoirs to deny them their source of knowledge, but then we too would suffer – never mind, it gets ethically complicated.

## 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 35 years' experience on a variety of projects in UK, Eastern Europe, Russia and the Far East. 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 Hon 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 past Chair of the ISO committee developing new international standards for Project Management and for Program/Portfolio Management. He has also served more than 20 years on the British Standards Institute project management committee including 7 years as Chairman. 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@msh-ltd.co.uk](mailto:miles.shepherd@msh-ltd.co.uk).