

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



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### INTRODUCTION

Unusually, this has been a busy month in the UK project world with encouraging reports of small modular reactors, a number of major projects with problems and old favourites like the airport expansion debate. We also have late news of a major housing expansion programme and, dare one whisper, a secret project – so it is on with the report.

### GOOD NEWS

**Renewables.** This seems a little like déjà vu, but my energy imp tells me that for the first time, the majority of Britain's energy needs have been met from renewable sources. Government statistics for 2024 show wind, solar and biomass produced 50.4% of the total electricity supply, topping the 46.5% for the previous year.

Wind generation increased to a record 29.5% (84.1TWh), up from 28.1% (82.3TWh) in 2023, due to higher wind speeds and increases in capacity. Offshore wind generated 17.2% (48.9TWh) and onshore wind 12.3% (35.1TWh).

Solar provided 5.2% (14.8TWh) and nuclear 14.25% (40.6TWh) of the total electricity. Low carbon sources (renewables and nuclear) generated a



Image: Crown Estate and Chris James

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record 65% (185.2TWh), while fossil fuels fell to levels last seen in the 1950s at 31.5% (89.7TWh).

Analysts claim the Government is on track to achieve its goal of 95% clean power by 2030. However, record amounts of renewable generation will need to be added to achieve the goal. Much of this will need to come from solar and offshore wind which will need to triple, according to the National Energy Systems Operator. Analysis also warns that despite sufficient projects in the pipeline, planning permissions will need to be speeded up and zombie projects (see my report for June) to be weeded out.

**Small Modular Reactors – Home and Away.** Rolls-Royce is chasing a target of becoming the country's largest company by market value according to press reports. Already Britain's largest engineering firm, this target bodes well for large projects as in order to achieve this objective, more projects will need to be undertaken to supplement the aero engine programmes.

Chief Executive **Tufan Erginbilgic** is placing his eggs in the Small Modular Reactors (SMRs) basket where he sees advantage from their involvement with the Royal Navy's nuclear-powered submarines. Rolls-Royce have signed deals with the UK and Czech governments, and they have reached the final stage in Sweden's competition to select a nuclear partner.

## NOT SO GOOD NEWS

**Major Project Audit.** Readers will know that Government Departments have ambitious, complex and costly projects. In the good old days, these fell under the auspices of the IPA. Note this IPA was the Infrastructure and Projects Authority, not India Pale Ale although some PMs are known to prefer the latter for support. Well, now the portfolio is the responsibility of NISTA or National Infrastructure and Service Transformation Authority. NISTA also absorbed the National Infrastructure Commission (NIC). What does all this have to do with your summer reading, I hear you ask? The answer is NISTA has just launched its annual report on the Government Major Projects Portfolio.

The report is available from <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/nista-annual-report-2024-2025> and the headline, as reported in the responsible Press, is that £200 billion worth of projects are at risk. The discerning PM (project manager) will wonder at risk of what. The answer lies, not in the soil although the Farming and Countryside programme is a cause for concern, but in a range of major projects. NISTA uses a rating system similar to that of the old IPA to rate projects. The ratings are called Delivery Confidence Assessments

DCA	2024	2025
Red	27	31
Amber	163	135
Green	25	30
Exempt		17
Total projects	215	213

(DCA). The good news is that 9.4% of its 213 projects are rated Green., an improvement on 2024. The not so good news is that 150 projects are rated Amber while the remaining 31 are Red. The comparison can be seen in the table (above).

In a neat variation of the 3-card trick, a new category of exempt has been slipped in. The report is an interesting read and has some well-presented statistics. Moreover, it is easily understood, unlike some Government documents.

The big issues remain around HS2 but that is too well known to need any further comment in these pages. Rail seems to be an issue for Government as the Northern Powerhouse Rail project comes in as Red. The project is part of the overall Northern Powerhouse Project, a programme I suppose, and is intended to improve transport between Britain's major northern cities — Liverpool and Manchester in the West, Newcastle, Leeds, Sheffield and Hull in the East. The rail project is estimated at £30.6 billion but it is feared to be unachievable.

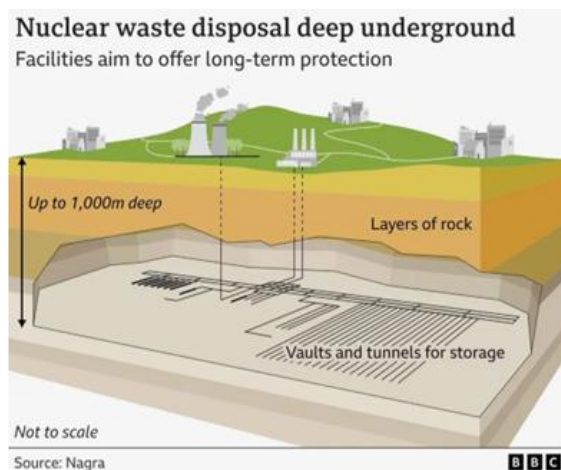


Image NAGRA via BBC

Another project that was not on my personal radar and causing some concern is the Deep Geological Disposal Facility (GDF) which is planned to store high-level radioactive waste. Earlier this year Nuclear Waste Services (NWS) identified "Areas of Focus" for potential GDF sites in Mid Copeland, South Copeland (Cumbria), and East Lincolnshire. No site has been approved, and construction is not scheduled to begin until 2040 which should allow plenty of time for local residents to make their feelings known.

More to the point, NISTA auditors say the project should cost between £20 and £53 billion. This is a good spread of estimates, and it is not clear what assumptions underpin it – or is this an early example of Generative AI assisted estimation?

**Future of Green Energy.** Despite the good news about the ever-increasing part green energy is playing in the power supply of the nation, there remain major issues. These are not new and mainly revolve around grid capacity. A particularly stark reminder of the problem was provided by Ben Cooke of The Times, who reported that many of Scotland's new wind farms were at a stand-still as gusts of up to 124mph battered Scotland during Storm Floris.

High winds present two problems, first, the turbines can become overloaded and burn out and second, they produce so much energy that it cannot be carried by the national grid or stored. Wind farms that produce no electricity also present difficulties as the

owners have to be compensated for not producing energy and idle turbines provided ammunition for NIMBY protests.

As noted above, expanding the grid is expensive and beset with planning problems as we have reported several times in the past. The range of problems for the government is going to be hard to handle, clamping down on “curtailment costs”, expanding grid capacity and developing additional energy storage systems will challenge the Government. This must offer opportunities to the project world.

**Nuclear Regulations.** On top of the good news about SMRs comes a risk! Our nuclear regulation is claimed to be not fit for purpose. This will come as no surprise to anyone who has worked in the sector, however this charge comes from no less a person than **John Fingleton**, head of the Nuclear Regulatory Taskforce. He claims the nuclear regulatory system was “not fit for purpose” and required a “once-in-a-generation reset”. The cynical might think he is following in the footsteps of the late Mandy Rice Davies who famously said “well, he would say that, wouldn’t he”.

The taskforce is a recent creation of the Government who are seeking to cut red tape to get the Country working again (I know shades of a cry from over the pond but that’s what it looks like). Optimists like me hope this is actually a step in the right direction that will maintain safety but encourage quicker development of what will eventually be the major energy source in this country.

## **OTHER PROJECT NEWS**

**Green Planes.** No, not coloured but ones powered by electricity and other low emission engines. Long term readers will recall previous reports on these aircraft which some see as the future of the taxicab. Several prototypes have made successful flights in UK and elsewhere, so it comes as something of a surprise to learn that Boeing and Airbus have both shut down their development programmes. There will be an impact on the project world but nothing like the impact on natural world.

**Airport Expansion.** The bit about red risk projects reminded me of another dead duck, or two dead ducks: the expansion of London’s two major airports. There has been a flurry of press reports on possibilities for a third runway at Heathrow. Our esteemed Chancellor of the Exchequer, **Rachel Reeves**, let it be known that the government supports expansion for it earlier this year and now, we have two plans to do just that.

The two plans are significantly different: the in-house plan envisages a 3,500-metre-long runway with the M25 tunnelling underneath it and is estimated at £49 billion. The other, from hotel billionaire **Surinder Arora**, sees the third runway as a mere 2,800 metres long. More importantly, the Arora plan avoids moving a part of the M25 and potentially costly tunnelling. This stretch is the one of the busiest sections of the UK motorways, and one of the most congested stretches of road in Europe





Possible Terminal 6

Image: Arora

According to my transport imp, Heathrow's shareholders have not yet given their views so this is a project that is likely to run on for a while yet.

**Airport Project Challenge.** To keep the airport boil boiling, we have an interesting notion put forward by 16 professors of economics at British universities as well as other unidentified gurus who have written an open letter to our esteemed Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Transport Secretary (different people for those who don't follow the machinations of Government – jobs for the girls others cry!) calling for "impact assessments" of airport expansion projects. They challenge the Chancellor's declaration of the importance of such projects for her plan to get the economy moving again and claim the "benefits are best uncertain". Quelle Surprise, I hear you cry! In my naïve way, I thought not only do business cases always include impact assessments (usually at least 3 different types) and benefit management is ingrained in planning major projects. How could I have been so mistaken?

## CLOSING REMARKS

As the long hot summer draws to a close, it is nearly time to say farewell to many of the migratory birds that visit UK. There are many reintroduction projects in UK but the ones nearest to my home are bringing back **common cranes** (see right) on the Somerset levels. These are mostly resident birds and do not migrate. This successful reintroduction effort has led to increased numbers of



breeding pairs and a growing population, with many cranes now regularly seen in the area's wetlands and nature reserves.



Image: Gary Franklin

Another successful reintroduction is the **White Stork** Project. Project birds include ground nesting pairs, mainly from Poland who have been nursed back from injury but breed quite happily in protected surroundings. Many of the fledglings are migratory, or at least travel, usually in flocks. This season 45 birds fledged, and some are already in Morocco.

You can follow their progress here  
<https://whitestorkproject.org/our-storks/>.

**Ospreys** have been in the news as a nesting pair has stopped a rock festival project in Wales. The Welsh government bought a farm for £4.75 million with a view to using it as an event venue. However, ospreys were sitting tenants and had been nesting so plans for the music festival were cancelled as it would have interfered with a Schedule 1 bird. There were repercussions over due diligence and excessive haste in procurement.

**Stone Age Project.** If you haven't visited Stonehenge, you won't appreciate the wild landscape and probably wonder how the people who built it lived. You need not wonder for much longer as a new project has begun to build a new facility that would have been familiar to our ancestors. The building, pictured below, will be a learning centre that will support educational activities. Around 48,000 children visit Stonehenge on free school trips every year, and a further 12,000 on their expert-led Discovery Visits according to **Steve Bax**, English Heritage's Operations Director Stonehenge and West.



New Learning Centre (Image: English Heritage)

The Learning Centre project has been made possible thanks to the generous support of donors including Garfield Weston Foundation, Kusuma Trust, National Highways, Clore Duffield Foundation, Wolfson Foundation, Mr Rebhi Barqawi, The Syder Foundation, and many other kind supporters.

**Secret Project.** Well done for reading to the end of this report. It is difficult to understand how a project reported in the national press can be a secret, but the reporter clearly thinks it is. Apparently, civil servants are investigating a national digital ID system. It is called Operation Kelp to keep it secret, but clearly that hasn't worked. UK officially abandoned the notion of digital ID cards back in 2010, but a Conservative spokesman resurfaced the idea in February as part of a scheme to slow down illegal migration and now some unnamed Ministers are pushing the idea privately while some Labour think tanks offer public support. Surprisingly little outrage has been stirred by this further intrusion into our lives by all-seeing State Apparatchiks!

## 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@misp-ltd.co.uk](mailto:miles.shepherd@misp-ltd.co.uk).