

UK Project Management Round Up¹



*By Dr Miles Shepherd
Executive Advisor & International Correspondent
Salisbury, England, UK*

INTRODUCTION

This is an auspicious report – at least for me! This is the 150th report I have written for PM World Journal. The first hit screens around the world in August 2012 and covered the London Olympics, professional society news and a major conference.



This month follows a similar pattern but as is now usual, covers the good the bad and the ugly of the project world with news of a major political split on competing major projects, further examples of red tape impact on projects, the results of the Stirling Prize, new nuclear developments and last but not least, the fallout from the Trump visit. I close with some news of wildlife projects and a puzzling restoration project. As you can see, my Honest Serving Men are more like those of Kipling's "person small" who "keeps ten million serving-men, who get no rest at all!" If you are unfamiliar with this, check out *Just So Stories* or <https://www.greatexpectations.org/wp-content/uploads/pdf/lp/curiosity/Poems%20for%20Curiosity.pdf>

NOT SO GOOD NEWS

➤ Project Planning Delay



This is a little like shooting fish in a barrel. First, we learn that the pace of house building is "not acceptable" according to the Housing Secretary Steve Reed. He only recently assumed this "job" and promised to improve the promised delivery of houses. Then we hear that some 80,390 projects were submitted for approval in the period April – June. This is 5% less than in the same period last year and the second lowest in the past decade. Despite the jingoistic turn of

¹ How to cite this work: Shepherd, M. (2025). UK Project Management Round Up, PM World Journal, Vol. XIV, Issue XI, November.

phrase, no action has been proposed. Clearly, house building is not the priority as **George Weston**, who runs Associated British Food highlighted a case where a proposal for 1000 new homes to be built on a brown field site near York was lodged in 2007. It gained full clearance in February 2025!



The military are also suffering from red tape as Elf & Safety is preventing the testing of autonomous boats in British waters. Only remote-controlled vessels can be tested. Clearly AI is not impressing the Maritime and Coastguard Agency. Details were reported in The Times and indicate trials would need dedicated teams which would need up to 6 months to complete the paperwork needed for drones so how much time would be needed to

deal with autonomous sea-going vessels. (Image: Royal Air Force)

➤ **Impact of external factors**

Projects are always at the mercy of external factors and there are plenty of examples this month. One you might not have thought of is the impact of the issues faced by the Office of National Statistics (see my report for February this year). A number of factors combined to undermine the reliability of many labour related statistics. Just what has this got to do with projects you might wonder? Well, it turns out that it impacts on the Government's ability to fund its major projects portfolio. This is manifested in the ability of the Bank of England to provide accurate forecasts and so threatens funding decisions.

The cyber attack at Jaguar Land Rover (JLR) also has an unexpected impact. While production is badly affected, there is also a major impact on the supply chain. The widespread adoption of Japanese planning approaches, most notably the Just in Time supply chain hits in both directions when production stops. The Cyber Monitoring Centre estimates that JLR, its supply chain and local businesses have taken a £2.1 billion hit. Similar attacks at Marks and Spencers (a major retail chain) and Co-op (a supermarket and grocery supplier) cost in the region of £400 million.

Politics US style hit Orsted, the Danish wind farm developer in October when the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management imposed a stop-work order. This halted work for Revolution Wind whose major project was 80% complete. The Bureau claimed the work caused unspecified national security concerns. While this incident is US based, there is concern that it could impact the huge offshore projects in the North Sea. Orsted is already under financial pressure and have repeatedly warned that their North Sea commitments may be impacted by external financial factors. They are a particularly important energy supplier and currently provide:

- 2 operational offshore wind farms
- 2 in development (Hornsea 4 and Mooir Vannin)
- Total capacity, 5.6 GW

- Enough to power almost 6 million UK homes
- Over 7% of the UK's electricity

We hear that Orsted has filed a lawsuit against the US Administration but no doubt that will be held up by the shutdown in Washington DC.

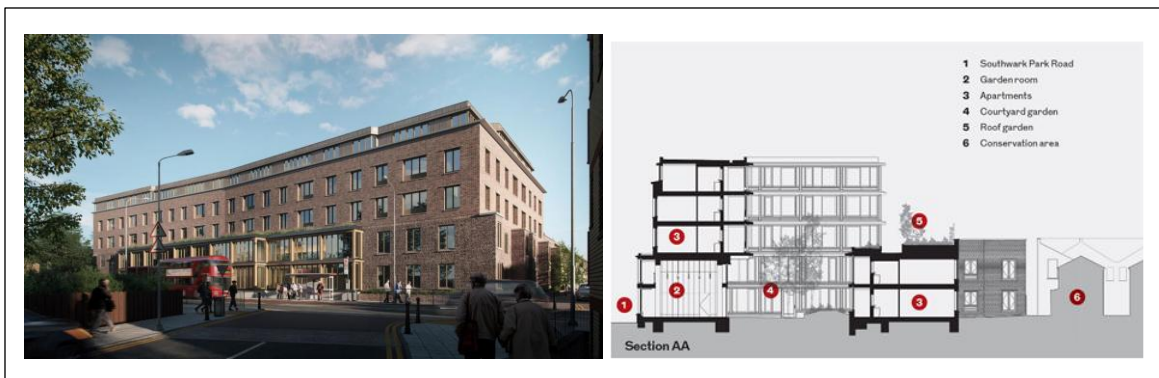
➤ **Odds and Ends**

Electric Car Targets have been dealt another blow as Stellantis, who own Vauxhall, Jeep and Peugeot have abandoned their plans to produce only electric cars by 2030. Volvo, Mercedes-Benz, Ford and General Motors started the ball rolling. The situation has become the focus of EU attention and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyden held a meeting with motor manufacturers who are calling for a relaxation of the 2035 target as they struggle to shift electric only vehicles.

Digital ID is, not surprisingly, coming under fire from many directions. Apart from libertarians, Parliamentarians have raised various objections including worries that the requirement to hold a Digital ID card to be employed in UK discriminates against Irish workers. To add insult to injury, US Tech Bros in the form of Palantir Technologies have refused to become involved (not sure they were in the running anyway) as they claim it is undemocratic, and it is a “programme that needs to be decided at the ballot box”. Strange claim from a US company in these troubled times. **Louis Mosley**, head of Palantir in the UK, said there was no “clear resounding public support” for digital ID.

GOOD NEWS

➤ **The Stirling Prize** shortlist was reported last month and contained a number of innovative architectural designs, all of which are implemented as projects. The judges awarded the prize to the Appleby Blue Almshouse. The images below, from RIBA Journal, show the design and build which won a hatful of awards: RIBA London Award 2025, a RIBA National Award 2025, Neave Brown Award for Housing 2025, Client of the Year 2025, and Stirling Prize 2025. Designed for the United Saint Saviour's Charity by Witherford Watson Mann Architects



Ingrid Schroder, Director of The Architectural Association (AA) School of Architecture, speaking on behalf of the RIBA Stirling Prize Jury explained,

“This project is a clarion call for a new form of housing at a pivotal moment. Built against the backdrop of two crises, an acute housing shortage and a growing loneliness epidemic among older people, Appleby Blue offers a hopeful and imaginative response, where residents and the surrounding community are brought together through the transformative nature of the design”.

➤ Nuclear News

Fusion breakthrough – another claim from Culham, and one that sounds familiar. We have previously reported developments in the search for the energy riches promised by nuclear fusion.

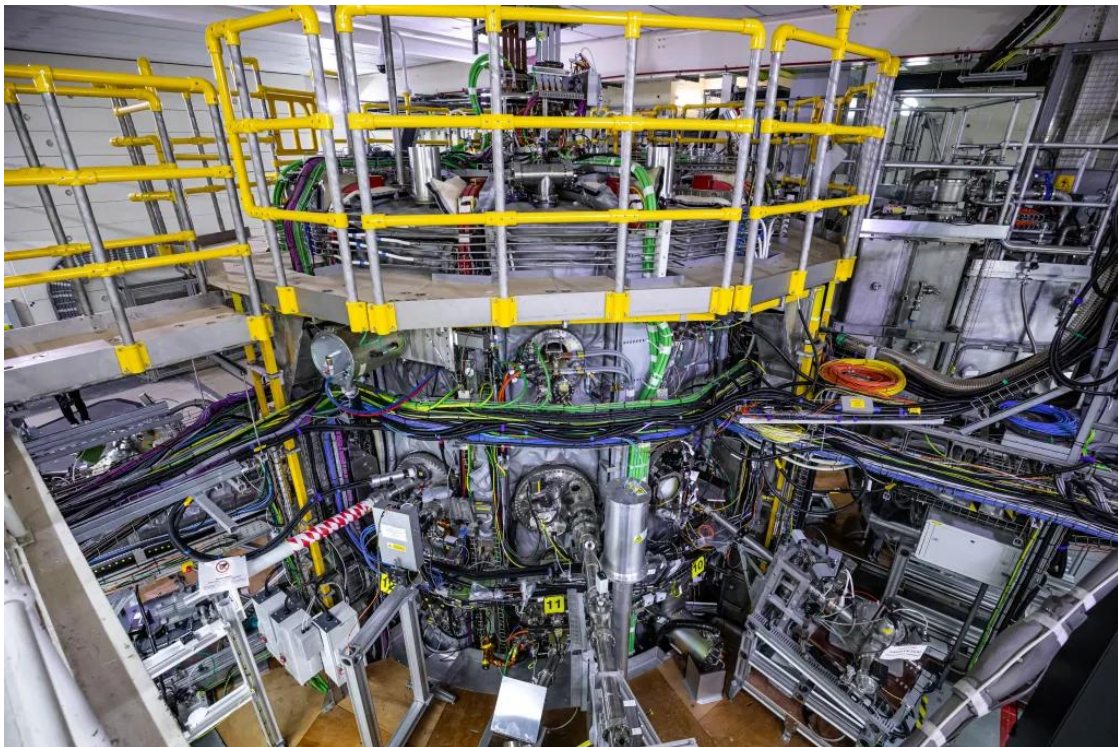


Image: United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority

The highly complex machine illustrated above is the Mega Amp Spherical Tokamak Upgrade or MAST-U. The development team reported in mid-October that they have used small magnetic coils to stabilise the plasma's outer edge. Previous research has centred on large, doughnut-shaped devices: these results are based on smaller and more compact type of fusion machine known as a spherical tokamak. The significance of this achievement lies in controlling the edge of the reaction which is where the trouble usually starts.

The Times reports that the MAST team have demonstrated that the machine's upper and lower divertors can be controlled independently. This is another world-first: it allows heat and waste particles to be managed once the fuel is spent. This is particularly important in a fusion plant as the plasma will collapse and the machine will be damaged should the plasma hit the side of the reactor.

Nuclear Plants Heysham 1 and Hartlepool have been given one-year life extensions and will now remain in operation until 2028. The plants can, between them, power about 4 million homes. This extension comes on the back of passing safety inspections and enhances Britain's energy security and allows EDF, the plant operators and developers of Hinkley C so breathing space as their new plant is not expected to come online before 2029 and could be delayed to 2031. Heysham and Hartlepool are AGR reactors with graphite bricks surrounding the cores. These bricks can deteriorate with age and could prevent control rods being inserted to close down the reactor. Both plants were scheduled to shut down by 2014 but additional investment and considerable safety work has allowed several previous extensions.

➤ **Overseas Investment**

Last month we had the Trump Tour which seemed to spread largesse to all parts of the British economy. There was some hope that Our New Illustrious Leader (ONIL) might rein in the Chancellor of the Exchequer, sometimes know as Her Hand in Your Pocket (HHIYP) Reeves but no such luck! Prospects for next month's budget do not look good despite a series of significant investments. In one week, I noted press reports of £150 bn coming from US firms and another £22 bn from Microsoft. Clearly much of this is linked to AI and is likely to result in a large number of major projects but it is always as well to remember that investors are not doing us any favours, they will extract the profits, retaining ownership and control so ONIL needs to display a great deal more commercial and strategic savvy than he has done so far.

OTHER PROJECT NEWS

➤ **Northern Lights.** Last month we reported on Liverpool Waters development, a mega project that included a new stadium for Everton football club and a number of other important projects. This type of project is pretty uncommon, so I was surprised and heartened by news of another major development project. Teesworks is 4,500-acre development on a site that was once the centre of the steelmaking in the northeast. Currently, it is one of biggest brownfield sites in Europe. It could soon become a £100 billion scheme designed to be Britain's answer to Silicon Valley

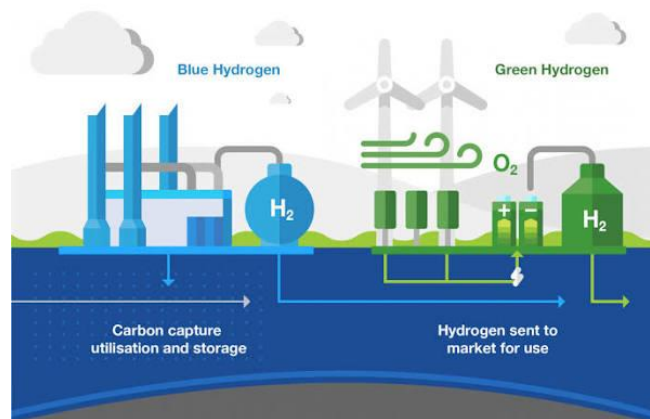


as the image from Google shows.

The plan is to build a huge data centre that would power Britain's answer to ChatGPT. Such a development could pave the way for major savings in the NHS and defence. The plan envisages a data centre four times the size of the largest similar project in America. According to press reports, Amazon, Microsoft and Google are in advanced talks to invest in the site.

This all sounds good, but it is not a done deal. BP wants to build a large-scale blue hydrogen production facility called H2Teesside. Blue hydrogen is a low-carbon fuel produced from natural gas (or other fossil fuels) using steam methane reforming, combined with carbon capture and storage (CCS) technology to capture and store the resulting carbon dioxide emissions.

This development is a hydrogen production plant of up to 1,200-megawatt thermal capacity. The application to the National Infrastructure has gone through all the preliminary stages and a decision from the Planning Inspectorate is scheduled for 30 October. Once in production, H2Teesside could deliver 10% of the UK's 2030 hydrogen production target.



However, construction of the hydrogen plant and the artificial intelligence data centre is impossible — in part, because they would occupy the same land. Local Conservative mayor **Lord Ben Houchen**, spearheading the AI plans, has formed an unusual coalition of his own: with political opponents **Sir Keir Starmer** and **Peter Kyle**, the business secretary. Proponents of the hydrogen plant are energy secretary **Ed Miliband** and oil giant BP. There has been little public debate on what sounds like a pretty significant decision but once the decision has been announced, you can be sure there will be a major debate, and delay.

➤ **Project legitimacy** raised its head with the earlier report of Palantir Technologies declining to participate in the Secret Project (also known as the Digital ID project). As noted above, the UK head claimed there is no great public support for the project. Apart from the hypocrisy of claimed rationale, the issue raised is significant because if Project Management is to be properly recognised as a profession, we need to be able to reject projects we believe are immoral, illegal or otherwise should not be undertaken. This is an area where PMs have been seen to fail in the past – think of the Horizon Project and emission falsification in new car development projects.

➤ **Stonehenge SPD** could put an end to the squabbles over developments in the vicinity of Stonehenge and Avebury. According to the report on this Supplementary Planning Document, its purpose is to inform decisions relating to development that may affect the Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) of the World Heritage Site (WHS) through changes to the setting of the WHS, or the monuments within it that contribute to its OUV. It covers a very large physical area of the Stonehenge, Avebury and Associated Sites World Heritage Site. The 156-page document will certainly add another level of bureaucracy to any development in the area!

CLOSING REMARKS

➤ **Red Squirrels Resurgent.** These lovely creatures are quite rare these days, having suffered depredation from American Grey Squirrels and the diseases they carry. However, sightings have been more plentiful this year as the weather has been especially kind, producing a glut of seeds and nuts in the forest habitat where the Reds live. Ecologists have suggested that this has led to a year with two breeding seasons.



There are other signs that work by rangers in Cumbria has been successful. A report in The Times notes that the population has stayed above target levels for four consecutive years, and between January and September this year the rangers counted 215 reds, a 24 per cent rise on the same period last year.

➤ Another contributing factor may be the reintroduction of pine martins. These weasel-like mustelids are native to Britain and although far from common, have enjoyed a resurgence in several parts of the country and have been reintroduced in several other areas, including parts of Cumbria. Pine martins prey on grey squirrels but cannot reach the higher parts where the red squirrels live.



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 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@msp-ltd.co.uk.