

UK Project Management Round Up¹



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INTRODUCTION

As we Approach the season to be jolly, there has been a notable air of gloom pervading the UK project world as we anticipate another raid by Central Government on anything to do with money. Yes, it is Budget time once again and the leaks have been coming thick and fast. As with most leaks, they have proved to be less than accurate although the fiscal news is not great but there is some cheer on the horizon.

This month I bring some good news in the form of a successful project, prospects for new programmes in the defence and power fields as well as a round up of other project news. So, let's start with the Good News

GOOD NEWS

National Rehabilitation Centre (NRC). This is a rare case – not because it is a major infrastructure project that was delivered on time, within budget and fulfills the needs and expectations of its stakeholders – but because it is recognised in national press with full reports on BBC and national press.

The £105m NRC project aims to transform rehabilitation care, research, and training in the UK. This required the construction of a new 70 bed facility designed to integrate with the natural landscape. It is specified to the highest standards of sustainability, aiming to achieve net zero carbon over the entire life of the building.

Lead architect was Paul Treacey, supported by a full design team included Paul Treacy Architects, Ryder Architecture, Fira Landscape, and other partners. Construction was managed by Integrated Health Projects (IHP), an alliance between Sir Robert McAlpine and Vinci Construction UK.

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Digital construction played a pivotal role in the project's success, with the IHP team leveraging advanced technologies to:

- deliver data driven insights that improved workflow efficiency and risk mitigation
- spot bottlenecks and identify root causes
- enact mitigation plans and measure success

IHP used **AI-powered progress tracking system Buildots** as part of an integrated tech solution designed to identify and mitigate potential causes of delays, support lookahead meetings with objective data, and boost productivity with smarter planning.



Based at the Stanford Hall Rehabilitation Estate alongside the Defence Medical Rehabilitation Centre (DMRC), it will benefit from the specialist knowledge developed at the DMRC, via the sharing of expertise, knowledge and feedback with the defence facility. The specialist healthcare facility combines National Health Service (NHS) care with research and

innovation from academic partners the University of Nottingham and Loughborough University.

BAE Systems successes. Defence manufacturer BAE Systems has won a number of contracts that build its 2025 order book to more than £27 Bn. A major part of this is a £5.4 Bn order for 20 Typhoon aircraft, (see left) associated weapons and an integration package.



In a separate programme, BAE acquired Last month a 96 acre former pharmaceutical plant owned by Glaxo Smith Kline (GSK). The plant is being decommissioned by GSK and seem likely to be repurposed to support BAE's major site in Barrow-in Furness where UK's nuclear submarines are built.

SSE Network Upgrades. This one is in the pending tray as it is a promise rather than actual fact but SSE, the energy supplier, has announced a £33 billion investment plan

that includes an invitation to investors to stump up £2 billion and to sell £2 billion of assets to help fund a “once-in-a-generation” expansion of its electricity network.

For those not familiar with the UK energy industry, SSE is based in Perth, in Scotland, operates electricity transmission cables in the north of Scotland and distribution networks in Scotland and central southern England. It also operates wind farms, hydro plants and gas-fired power stations.

The investment plans are aimed at expanding coverage and removing bottlenecks in the Britain’s transmission cabling network, as we have reported previously. These are forcing the National Energy System Operator (NESO) to pay increasing sums to switch off wind farms in remote locations, including those owned by SSE, and to fire up gas plants closer to cities. Improvements are planned as a series of projects.

NOT SO GOOD NEWS

High Speed 2 updates. Reporting on the latest vicissitudes of HS2 is akin to shooting fish in a barrel as the much-modified programme lurches on. The latest blow to morale is a further delay to so called Northern Powerhouse Rail Project. A holding statement just before the Labour Party Conference put off the expected announcement but since then, we have been told that plans are now delayed until after the Budget (more on this later), but reports indicate concerns over long-term costs of the line planned between Liverpool and Manchester have pushed back the revival of plans.



A new rail line between Liverpool and Manchester is seen a central piece of the overall Northern Powerhouse rail project, which is aimed at cutting travel times between northern cities and towns as well as boosting the UK economy outside of London.

A plan had been expected at the time of the June Spending Review, then the government's infrastructure strategy unveiling, and then in the

publication of a pipeline of key infrastructure projects, but no announcements have been made to date. It is little wonder that half the population believe that HS2 should be scrapped to fill the budget shortfall (which we learned last week does not exist) , according to a new polling. Apparently, only 18 per cent of people think it is acceptable for the government to raise taxes while keeping the high-speed rail line, which is already billions over budget.

Investment problems. It is to be hoped that the Budget announced by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, variously known as Robber Rachel or Her Hand in Your Pocket, will

help the business environment. No matter one's political persuasion, it must be recognised that financial climate is causing concern. Getlink, owners of Eurotunnel, have pulled millions of pounds it planned to invest in UK rail infrastructure. Plans to reopen a freight terminal in east London have been abandoned after the Valuation Office Agency proposes a 200 per cent increase in rateable value. "At a marginal tax rate of 75 per cent on new investment, any new investment would be loss making. Eurotunnel has therefore frozen all new rail investments in the UK," a spokeswoman said.

According to a business report in *The Times*, Eurotunnel has been planning to invest about £15 million in two freight projects: reopening a terminal in Barking and running a new direct service from Lille. Both have now been halted.

Lithium Project Abandoned. Rio Tinto has a long track record of lithium mining projects with its Rincon project in Argentina and Arcadium Lithium so it must be a disappointment to abandon what looked to be its most promising project. The Jadar Mine project has been subject to delays, disputes over licences and resource issues. Rio Tinto has scrapped the project which was expected to produce 58,000 tonnes of lithium annually and up to 2.3 million tonnes of lithium carbonate.

Ajax Problems. The long running difficulties of the General Dynamics Ajax armoured fighting vehicle (AFV) continue with press reports of further illnesses induced by vibrations. This issue has been extensively reported on these pages and from personal experience, it is very hard to understand how vibrations, which are inevitable in any AFV, can lead to apparent incapacity of fit, generally young soldiers.

Building Controls Collapse. news that Assent Building Compliance Ltd has been wound up is causing major concern in the construction sector. One of a growing number of private sector building controls companies that offers an alternative to local government controls. Reports indicate that Assent may have been working on 15,000 building projects. While not all these projects will be affected by the collapse, it is inevitable that many will face hold ups, particularly in the house building sector.

Chronic Mismanagement. Approximately 40 half-built houses in my old stamping grounds in West London are set to be demolished. The construction of 53 homes received a £100 million grant from the Greater London Authority and 31 of those were designated for affordable housing or shared ownership. Henry Construction was awarded a £40 million contract to build the homes, alongside other projects in the borough, in January 2022. Claims of "chronic mismanagement" were levelled as some 52 homes across a number of sites have been stalled for 2 years after Henry Construction went but in 2023. At the time, Ealing council said it was looking for a contractor to complete the almost-finished homes and earlier this month, the council confirmed it will instead demolish the half-built properties as it seeks a more "cost-effective solution".

OTHER PROJECT NEWS

New Projects. We have had a number of new projects announced recently, football stadia, airport expansions, medical and nuclear.

New Football Stadium.

Birmingham City FC have announced plans for new 62,000-capacity stadium. Part of a multi-billion-pound programme of redevelopment in the city, it will be visible from 40 miles away.



Tom Wagner, club chairman, said it will become a "beacon for excellence in Birmingham". Despite the euphoria within the Club, there are some challenges to be faced, not least is how to fill the stadium both on match days and between football games. The new stadium is planned to cost £1.2 billion so the cost benefit analysis will be pretty important.

New Nuclear. The long-awaited government decision on where to site the first small modular reactors (SMR). The pioneering plant is to be built by Rolls-Royce and will be located at Wylfa on Anglesey. Interestingly, this has drawn criticism from no less an authority than the US ambassador to the UK. **Warren Stephens** asserted that Wylfa was better suited to a conventional reactor. This is probably no surprise when recalling Westinghouse's interests and safety case work in UK. Mr Stephens might do well to remember the local government reaction to such proposals last year when similar proposals evoked a strong rejection because of fears over the impact any influx of "foreign" (in that case – English) workers would have on the Welsh language and housing.

The Times reports that Sir Keir Starmer has vowed to "push past the nimbyism" to ensure deployment of several new smaller atomic plants, which Sir Tony Blair has also enthusiastically backed. Whether this is good news or not remains to be seen.

Airport Extension. The Government announced its decision on how to deliver improved capacity at London's Heathrow. Two schemes had been proposed, one to add a 3,500 metre full length runway and the other, a shorter a 2,800-metre runway. The long runway is proposed by the Airport itself while the other is the brainchild of Surinder Arora, the Chairman of the Arora Group. The problems with the long runway are that it will cut across the M25 motorway, causing immense congestion and disruption and some 700 houses would be destroyed. The shorter runway cannot accept all current aircraft. Ministers have decided to back the £33 billion third runway proposal, despite concerns about moving the M25.

If previous contentious projects are anything to go by, we will now move into a prolonged period of challenges, both legal and by so called “activists” – I doubt that I shall live long enough to see the start of the project.

Proposals. Not the matrimonial variety (be patient, it will soon be February) for new projects and programmes:

- **Tailored drugs**, adjusted for individual needs may be on the horizon. A £2.6 million centre of excellence, funded by the charity Brain Tumour Research, is running a world-first study involving 50 patients. It will provide personalised treatment, tailoring drugs to the specific genetic mutations of a patient’s brain cancer to stop it growing back.

- **Drug resistant trials**, GSK and the Fleming Initiative have announced six major new research programmes, called ‘Grand Challenges’ which harness some of the best scientific expertise and the latest technologies, including advanced AI, to find new ways to slow the progress of antimicrobial resistance (AMR). All of the new programmes announced today will begin by early 2026, are fully funded for 3 year.

The Fleming Initiative – a groundbreaking collaboration established by Imperial College London and Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust - brings together research scientists, policymakers, clinicians, behavioural experts, public and commercial partners to provide the networks, expertise and skills to provide equitable solutions to AMR at a global scale. GSK became the first founding partner of the Initiative, pledging £45m in funding in 2024 and backing the Fleming’s mission to help tackle AMR around the world and setting out a series of Grand Challenges.

- **Prostate Project.** In the wake of a number of high-profile cases, A major prostate screening trial aimed at finding the best way to detect the disease has been launched in the UK. Although it is formally called a trial, it is clearly a project in its design and management. The £42m Transform trial is funded by Prostate Cancer UK and the National Institute for Health and Care Research. The National Screening Committee (NSC) - an expert body that advises the NHS – has recommended that national level screening is not viable so this project is even more important as more accurate diagnosis will reduce false positives, reduce wasteful treatments and help reduce the 12,000 deaths that currently result from late identification of the disease.


- **Birmingham Regeneration.** This seems to be the year for announcing regeneration schemes. We reported Liverpool's plans back in March, now we learn of two more proposals. First is Birmingham and our piece about the new football stadium is part of the wider project. The enormous Smithfield project is set to redevelop the former wholesale market site into a landmark destination. The plans, which were given the green light by council planners last year, include proposals for homes, retail space, civic squares, a market complex, leisure facilities, a park and more. The city council confirmed archaeological works had begun at the site, marking an "important new phase" for the £1.9bn plan
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- **Manchester Regeneration.** Not to be out done, two boroughs in Greater Manchester have released transformation plans. Salford Council is supporting a new development zone running along the Manchester Ship Canal in Salford and Trafford which could generate thousands of jobs as homes and business premises are built. The area is one of six "growth locations" across Greater Manchester boroughs that aim to bring in about £10bn of investment.
- **New Skyscraper.** Another major project in Manchester has been announced as plans were approved by Salford City Council's planning team for a controversial scheme will see 10 high-rise towers built on land off Regent Retail Park in Ordsall, Salford - with the tallest standing at 895ft (273m) and 77 storeys. This scheme is part of a £1bn development featuring 3,300 homes but faces widespread opposition. Construction is expected to take 10 years and will see the northern half of Regent Retail Park knocked down to make way for the new homes.



Image: Henley Investments/Matt Brooks Architect

Planning Issues

Readers may recall our report in the September issue of a once in a generation review into reasons why UK nuclear was the most expensive and slow in the world. The task was assigned by the Prime Minister to **John Fingleton**, head of the Nuclear Regulatory Taskforce. Mr Fingleton had claimed the nuclear regulatory system was “not fit for purpose” and required a “once-in-a-generation reset”. The good news is the interim report has been published and is a free download (see <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/692080f75c394e481336ab89/nuclear-regulatory-review-2025.pdf>) . The report expands an interim report (also available) and is clearly the work of an experienced project manager. The panel identified a number of issues to be addressed, the most important of which are the complexity of the regulatory system and the strongly risk averse nature of those enforcing it. There are 47 recommendations, each with an owner and a timeline for delivery. The report is a model of clarity and an interesting read

Professional News. The run up to the festive season also seems to include some professional events. Perhaps the most significant has been the launch the **All Party Parliamentary Group for Project Delivery**. All-Party Parliamentary Groups (APPGs) are informal cross-party groups that have no official status within Parliament. They are run by and for Members of the Commons and Lords, though many choose to involve individuals and organisations from outside Parliament in their administration and activities. The APPG for Project Delivery was founded to provide a forum where parliamentarians can support and discuss the delivery of national projects, and

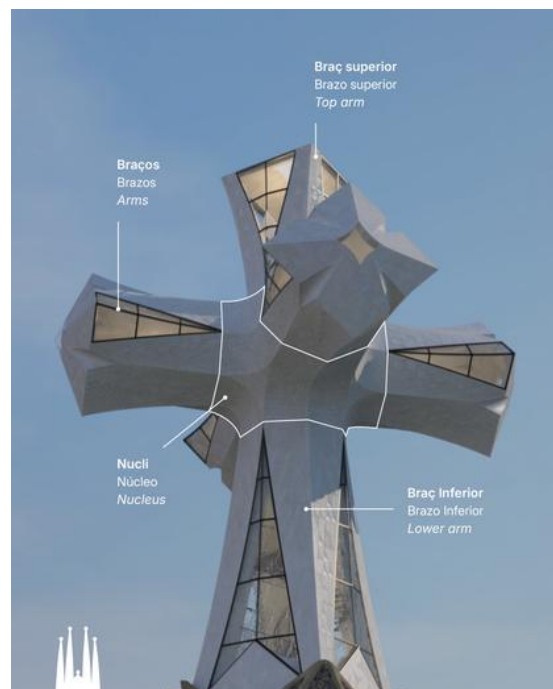
promote the uptake of best practices for project management from around the world. The APPG's work aims to ensure the UK has the essential skills, policies, and people required to successfully deliver major projects that drive economic growth, spread innovation, and build infrastructure across the entire country. For more information, see their website at <https://www.appgprojectdelivery.org/>.

November also saw the Association for Project Management (APM) Annual General Meeting. APM also announced the election of two trustees. Both are Fellows and both are Chartered Project Professionals. **Martina Blake** is currently a UK Government Advisor to the European Space Agency (ESA) and has a background leading complex and high-risk major projects and programmes in areas such as the space industry, government security, defence, digital, and transformation. **Rudy Hughes** is a Technical Director at WSP, a global engineering and professional services firm, where he is part of the Senior Leadership Team in Project and Commercial Management (PMCM) for civil engineering, infrastructure and utilities.

APM Project Management Awards were presented at a packed dinner held at the Park Plaza Westminster Bridge, London. There are 18 awards in all, 5 different types of organisations, 4 types of projects, 3 individual categories, 4 special categories, a competition award and an overall Project of the Year Award. The detailed list and winners may be seen at <https://www.apm.org.uk/apm-awards/#winners>.

CLOSING REMARKS

Long running projects. A report on the placement of a cross on a spire at Gaudí's Sagrada Familia in Spain caught my eye recently, partly as this topping out makes the Basilica the world's tallest church, a lofty position held previously by Germany's Ulm Minster. Antoni Gaudí's unfinished masterpiece stands at 162.91m to Ulm's 161.53m. Although Ulm was finished in 1890, it was started in 1377, but construction was halted in 1543 while construction of Sagrada Familia began in 1882 and remains unfinished. By comparison, Salisbury Cathedral is a mere 123m, construction commenced in 1220, and it was completed in 1258 although the tower and spire were added later, between 1300 and 1329. *Image: Sagrada Familia*



Sea Eagles in Wrong Place. Another local phenomenon is one of the several Sea Eagle reintroduction projects. Our closest is one on the Isle of Wright, about 40 km away "as the crow flies". There are now almost daily reports on Social Media of what are properly called White Tailed Eagles at local lakes. In a rare conservation success story, there are more than 200 breeding pairs across the UK. Tracking data shows their amazing flights over towns and cities. The name is deceptive as these birds are quite at home in semi-urban environments, unlike the Golden Eagle which is rarely seen away from the uplands of Scotland. Another example of a successful, and long term, project.

English Barrier Reef. The Aussies may be giving our boys a hard time in the Ashes, but we are catching up elsewhere. One of the largest artificial reefs in the world has been installed at a wind farm off the Sussex coast. The installation is part of a nature-inclusive design project and consists of 75,000 specially designed "reef cubes" placed at the bottom of a single turbine. The cubes help to protect the turbine from erosion while also serving as a home for a wide range of marine life. The project at the RWE's Rampion Offshore Wind Farm is the first of its kind.

And finally, I was surprised to read that bumblebees can distinguish between long and short flashes of light. No doubt some enterprising Project Manager will find a use for this remarkable skill.

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.

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