

UK Project Management Round Up¹



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INTRODUCTION

This is certainly the season to be jolly but as with all things project related, there are some downsides to consider – my personal downside concerns my reporting imps who are away on duty helping their cousins (Santa’s elves) at the North Pole. This report may therefore be a little shorter than normal.

It is traditional at this time of the year to look both forward to the new and back at what we have just endured to put the new into perspective, so this month I have a mixture of project related matters to lay out before you. I'll start with some of the major themes of 2025

LOOKING BACK

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has emerged as a major factor in many areas of our lives this year. Although it has been with us for at least 10 years and covers a diverse field, it has become almost ubiquitous in the past 12 months – so much so that it is hardly possible to open a newspaper without some dire prediction of job losses or the end of humanity as we know it.

My point is that we have lived with AI in many forms for years and we are all infuriated or delighted by the many ‘bots out there. I can remember working on what seemed a highly advanced neural network back in the Nineties where we had a device to identify forged signatures, and a spin off that identified and rated fine wines. They were what might be called smart systems but both sank without trace for a variety of reasons but mainly due to lack on benefit analysis.

The main PM member associations have all reacted strongly to the potential of AI to support not just the PMO but the professional project manager, so the good news is

¹ How to cite this work: Shepherd, M. (2026). UK Project Management Round Up, report, *PM World Journal*, Vol. XV, Issue I, January.

that AI is not just a threat to a range of (tedious) time-consuming and error prone jobs, but a tool for the PM.

Regeneration comes in two flavours, massive construction programmes and wildlife reintroduction and/or habitat restoration. In the former category we have the major schemes such as the Liverpool Waters development that included the new football stadium, York Central with its £2 billion plan for housing and retail; and Birmingham Smithfields projects to a multitude of smaller (and here I mean £25 million or less) plans for city centre upgrades such as those at Derby, Durham, Tamworth and Leeds. Apart from the headline construction projects, most involve smaller projects, too, such as the preliminary archaeological projects that ensure early history is captured.

One factor to consider is how all these programmes and projects are funded – and the answer is the taxpayer stumps up the sopondoolies through:

- **Levelling Up Fund (LUF).** A £4.8 billion fund announced in December 2024 which invests in local infrastructure (town centres, transport, culture) across three rounds, focused on improving everyday life and economic recovery.
- **Towns Fund,** Announced in 2021, it provided up to £25m (or £50m) to 101 towns for "Town Deals" to tackle specific local issues like ageing populations and limited opportunities. Several projects are yet to complete.
- **UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF):** Announced in 2021 and still running, this replaced EU structural funds, focusing on strengthening communities, improving places, and supporting local skills and businesses. The current round of funding is targeted on Mayoral Combined Authorities (includes Greater London Authority), Single Local Authorities (SLA), County Combined Authorities (CCA), and lower tier or unitary authorities elsewhere, mostly Labour party strongholds.
- **Local Regeneration Fund:** This is a new single capital pot announced in September 2025, merging the LUF, Towns Fund, and other pilots – so not new money.

And as we write, The Planning and Infrastructure Bill receives Royal Assent today, slashing delays and costs to get homes and critical infrastructure built faster. Whether this party-political puff on speeding up planning permissions is effective seems unlikely to work as even government plans are derailed by the professional protester (see Not so Good News later).

Rewilding is what some might call Type 2 regeneration and regular readers will have seen many reports of such projects in these pages. While I am a great supporter of improving wildlife habitats, there are risks involved – would you like to see Woolly Mammoths roaming the wide-open spaces of Rural Britain?

That said, there have been numerous re-introductions of creatures both large and small. On the large side, the bison in Kent have established themselves well and a calf was born and is reportedly thriving. On the small side, pine martens have reappeared in a couple of locations, not all the result of planned reintroductions. There continue to be several attempts to improve the population of water voles through breeding and release programs. Beavers are also on the increase although mostly in controlled habitats rather than in free release situations. On the avian front, wite tailed eagles, common cranes and storks projects have all continued and many more are in the planning stages so much looks good. There are, however, some problems which I will return to under the Not So Good section.

GOOD NEWS

Hard on the heels of the regeneration line comes further news of mega programmes. I feel Mega Projects is a misnomer for massive concepts with very high levels of funding take decades to complete and even longer to achieve the benefit plan. Here are a few to consider:

➤ **York Central** is a £2 billion programme has secured funding, and plans have been for 2,500 flats, a 213-bedroom hotel and one million sq. ft of offices, shops and restaurants, as well as a new entrance to the city's station



Image: York Central Ltd/Network Rail/Homes England

The image above shows an artists impression of the £2 billion transformation of a 110-acre plot of disused land next to York station previously owned by Network Rai. The York Central consortium developing the regeneration is a public-private partnership project led by McLaren Property and Arlington Real Estate.

➤ **London Dockland** has been looking for a developer for many years so the news that two have teamed up to build 700 new homes is a welcome Christmas present. Ballymore and Penta Real Estate, a Slovakian developer have joined forces to build houses in the Canary Wharf and Nine Elms. Construction work has already begun. The Canary Wharf project is a 52 Story tower block with 434 apartments while the Nine Elms development consists of 2 blocks – one 11 stories and the other 22 stories that provide 247 homes.

➤ **Art Wars.** While warfare is not strictly a PM topic, we can make an exception as the construction of a new wing at the National Gallery provides an opportunity for it to 'park its tanks' on the lawns of the Tate Gallery. What this says in normal speak is that the National will be expanding its coverage of British art by including from the



20th and 21st centuries. Of more significance, six architects have been shortlisted to design the new wing. These include British doyen **Sir Norman Foster**, **Kengo Kuma** from Japan and **Renzo Piano** from Italy. According to Gallery Director **Gabriele Finaldi** the plans, codenamed Project Domani, were for a £750 million campaign that would “help redefine the National Gallery for the next century”.

➤ **Pharma Deal.** In a strategic move to strengthen their UK presence, GSK have linked with Oxford Bio-Therapeutics, the Golden Triangle based clinical stage oncology firm. Clinical stage work is exclusively project based. The deal is described as a multi-year, multi-target partnership. This follows a key decision by the US Food and Drugs Administration that effectively opens a potential cancer treatment pipeline that GSK acquired as part of its 2023 licencing agreement with Hansoh, the Chinese pharma firm. The really good news is that this is just one of 15 potential treatment pipelines in the acquisition.

➤ **Chinese Lottery.** Intuitive Investments Group (IIG), a British company has secured £30 million in funding from Helikon Investment), to help it pitch a project to digitise the Chinese lottery. The equity funding would go towards the rollout of the technology platform of the Beijing-based Hui10 across China, to make lottery tickets digital. Draw-based lotteries in China are paper-based and reach only about 10% of the market compared with about 35% reached by most digital lottery platforms.

NOT SO GOOD NEWS

This used to be called the Bad News section but in these softer modern times, this offends Gen Z who are reported to lack the robustness of Boomers. However you slice it, there is plenty of it about, so I'll just mention two items.

➤ **Planning Challenge.** In an early challenge to the Government much vaunted planning system improvements, a top priority project to build a nuclear plant based on 3 small modular reactors is in disarray. Readers may recall the award of the project to Wylfa, on Anglesey and my concerns about the viability of this award as a previous project foundered on concerns about the impact of new jobs on the Welsh language. The new challenge comes not from parochial concerns but from perceived disturbance of a colony of Arctic and Common Terns that nest at Cemlyn nature reserve. The reserve is not a remote location with both National Trust attractions and tourist access and facilities. While avian conservation is important, it is hard to see how this is anything other than pure NIMBYism.

➤ **Wetlands Project abandoned.** In another “victory” for NIMBYism, the National Trust(NT) has been forced to abandon its attempts to rewild a Grade II listed parkland site at Sherborne Broadwaters, in Gloucestershire. Some will see this as sauce for the gander, and others will claim it as more to do with poor stakeholder management. The NT caused outrage, according to press reports, by first allowing an area to deteriorate and then to seek to turn it into a wetland environment.



Image: Andrew Woolley via Daily Telegraph

Locals called this passive vandalism, a term new to me but well-illustrated by the image above. This, and the previous item illustrate various aspects of stakeholder engagement needed on projects both large and small.

OTHER PROJECT NEWS

We all know there are many uncertainties in the Project World, and this is where some news items are classified as neither good nor so good. Top of my list this month is the outlook for hydrogen projects followed closely by speculation about electric air taxis and inward investment

➤ **All Gas and Gaiters?** Hydrogen has been hailed as a possible low-carbon fuel to beat climate change and as a result, tens of billions of pounds have been invested in a variety of projects, some thing we have reported over the past 12 months. The previous government set a target of 10 gigawatts of low-carbon hydrogen production by 2030 and investments such as the planned BP plant at Redcar. However, BP has scrapped this multibillion-pound project after clashing with a rival project to build a vast data centre at the former Redcar steelworks site.



Image: Alamy

“I think it’s probably fair to say that 10 gigawatts by 2030 is undeliverable,” says Clare Jackson, chief executive of Hydrogen UK, a trade body. If the modest target proposed by the last Government is to be achieved, the new government hydrogen strategy, expected within weeks, will be critical. A recent letter signed by many industry leaders calls for an ambitious policy and clear support for the industry.

Hydrogen can be used for fuelling industry or power plants, decarbonising transport, or replacing gas for home heating. The current regime seemed to share its predecessors' enthusiasm, describing hydrogen as "essential to achieve the government's clean energy superpower and growth missions". Now the Minister is looking at a 'more focused' role for hydrogen.

The industry is facing major issues as it is a complex and expensive task to make hydrogen production viable. Many things to come together: customers demand for hydrogen; pipelines to deliver it to them; a business model to cover the costs of production; and, in the case of blue hydrogen, carbon capture infrastructure to sequester the emissions. Co-ordinating all these things has proved challenging, and we know politicians are not enthusiastic about complexity and challenges.

➤ **Air Taxis.** This is a perennial topic and sometimes we have encouraging news and other times not so encouraging. It seems we are in the upbeat mode right now with excited reports in the national press. Joby Aviation produced the S4 prototype electric vertical take-off and landing (eVTOL) aircraft are presenting test pilots in the New Year to the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA). Successful tests would lead to commercial launches scheduled for Dubai, the US, Japan and the UK. So, as *The Times* reports, we could see four-seater electric air taxis branded Uber or Virgin flying from "vertiport" pontoons on the River Thames to beat the traffic to Heathrow or outpace trains to the north of the capital could be upon us. All you have to do is get to the vertiports!

➤ **Inward Investment.** Readers may recall the State Visit of Mr Trump and the brouhaha over promised investments. Huge sums were mooted in critical areas such as AI, data analytics, logistics and more. While all this is useful it must be remembered that major US firms are not doing anything for the pleasure such investment might bring. They expect to get much more out than they put in, any economist will remind you. As Project Managers know, if you sup with the Devil, you need a long spoon.

CLOSING REMARKS

And so we leave 2025 behind us – an interesting year for Project People. It was one that brought us fish discos to add to the cost of new nuclear projects; creative stakeholder interests like claims that padel courts cause diabetes and other technical challenges.

It also brought the reemergence of lost species such as the wolf spider and many wildlife reintroductions. Sadly not all these have gone smoothly, and police are investigating the death of three white tailed eagles in the South of England where the threat to livestock and game birds is minimal.

And as a final conundrum, I noted that the President of the Royal Institute of British Architects had written to the Architects Registration Board to say that he would not be

renewing his registration. This means that he cannot legally be called an architect. So what I hear you cry, he is saving his £225 registration fee! Well perhaps but more significantly, he is leading a major protest over how architects are defined. Specifically he is calling for

- The Architects Act to be repealed
- New legislation defining reserved activities to be introduced. This is defined as submitting full planning applications, building control applications, and final compliance certificates, and who can carry them out;
- Establishing a Built Environment Council to oversee the built environment industry professional bodies whose members are suitably competent professionals as named in the new legislation.

Somewhere, project management fits into this layered competence framework but it is not explicitly stated – should we be concerned – I think we should!

[Happy New Year!](#)

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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