

UK Project Management Round Up¹



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INTRODUCTION

The New Year is certainly moving quickly, and the project world has seen quite a lot of activity in terms of project performance, new prospects opening and old stories resurfacing. We kick off with a story both refreshing and unexpected and follow with more good news. The project world suffers, like the rest of the world, with disappointments, catalogued here as Not So Good News, and we highlight the most significant ones before moving on to a summary of other project news.

GOOD NEWS

➤ **High Speed Rail (HS2) Success.** No, this is a real development, and all the more welcome after all the bashing they have had. Readers may recall the Bat Shed (careful how you say this...) story last year where it emerged that a cool £100 million had been invested in a shed to protect bats. This has been raised as an example of planning bureaucracy and sheer lunacy, depending on the newspaper you read. Similarly, in 2024 the price was £100 million but this year it is £200 million (blame the Chancellor of the Exchequer for rampant inflation). Against this unlikely background, my Home Counties imp bring news that the shed is regarded as value for money. According to David Prÿs-Jones, head of natural environment at HS2, the structure, is a “professional response to a complex problem”.

It is not clear how the reasoning for this judgement works but this is clearly a serious matter of Health and Safety concern. While most commentators regard the structure as designed to protect bats, the safety of rail passengers is a significant aspect. The structure actually protects trains from the impact of bats. While a single bat might not

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be a risk, ask yourself what would happen if a very large number of bats joined together to attack a train? One for the risk analysts to ponder, me thinks.

➤ **Navy Project.** We rarely have any news of projects of the Royal Navy, so it is pleasing to learn of a successful result. *Proteus* is a full-size autonomous helicopter, and had its first flight at Predannack airfield in Cornwall. The aircraft is a demonstrator for the Royal Navy. The project aims to integrate uncrewed aerial systems alongside traditional crewed aircraft as part of the country's future "hybrid air wing" and the Atlantic Bastion strategy.

Designed and built in Yeovil by Leonardo, as part of a £60m programme for the Royal Navy, it supports 100 highly skilled jobs. The aircraft is equipped with sensors and computing systems controlled by advanced software that allows it to interpret its environment, make decisions and act without human intervention in the cockpit or cabin. According to the Company, *Proteus* is among the world's first full-sized autonomous helicopters.

➤ **No Shovel Projects.** Gone are the days of shovel ready projects, at least as far as the UK water industry is concerned. This familiar concept has not actually vanished but *Origin Tech*, a British company has developed "Find and Fix", which it describes as a "non-disruptive leak detection and repair technology". The purpose is to carry out repairs to our elderly water distribution system without the need for costly and disruptive excavation. Tested on 7,000 repairs on water leaks

The industry is under considerable pressure from Ofwat, the regulator, the industry is urgently seeking ways to reduce water losses through leaky pipes and its rate of failure. Three billion litres of water is leaked each day across the network — equivalent to 1,202 Olympic-size swimming pools

John Marsden, director and founder at Origin Tech, which has just secured a multimillion-pound investment from the Business Growth Fund, said: "This patent is a major milestone. Not just for Origin Tech, but for the future of water infrastructure in the UK. Repairing mains leak without excavation has been an industry aspiration for decades. "We're turning that ambition into reality, cutting time, cost, and disruption, all while helping water companies meet their environmental and operational goals."

NOT SO GOOD NEWS

➤ **Military Space Deal.** The UK military space programme has been running for more than 25 years and provides Skyjet, an "always on" dedicated "always on" communications and data network for the British armed forces. The £10 billion programme is seen as one of the world's most advanced military communication network. It was the first of its kind globally, with the first satellite launched in 1969.

Skynet procurement is nearing its end point after final bids were submitted in early December. According to The Times, the technology is UK owned, and has become a big defence industry export, with the US the second-biggest user. Some 17 Nato allies utilise Skynet services. This makes it a highly attractive target for US control so the bid from Lockheed Martin is viewed with some concern. Contract award is expected late this year.

Press reports estimate that Skynet employs about 500 staff in Stevenage and Portsmouth. Lockheed Martin ran the F-35 stealth fighter jet programme which had some major cost overruns and delays. It previously claimed that if it won the Skynet 6 contract it would build its first satellite factory outside America in the UK.

➤ **Army Projects (Ajax)** This is AJAX, an armoured fighting vehicle (AFV) developed in a £6.5 billion programme and beset, according to press reports, with a myriad of problems. One of these is/was vibrations which left crews feeling ill. This became serious and attracted the interest of politicians who said this just will not do! Salisbury. Now, the Minister for Defence Readiness and Industry – the Right Honourable Luke Pollard, has sacked the senior project officer (SRO) for failing to keep him properly informed. He cited reports of 35 soldiers falling ill while working on the vehicles, just weeks after Ajax's initial operating capability (IOC) status was awarded – marking it safe to use.



The Minister said, in his written answer to a question in the House of Commons "In this case, inaccurate information directly contributed to the decision to declare initial operating capability for Ajax.

"This is unacceptable, and today I have written formally to the wider department to explain how I expect people to be accurate, innovative and challenge unnecessary process and bureaucracy, whilst maintaining our people's safety".

It seems he cannot have it both ways, accurate information is rarely innovative!

➤ **Project Problems.** We have two main issues this month; the first is a large but local issue and the second a seemingly small but national one. The large problem concerns the construction of a power line from Norwich to Tilbury, a troubled concept that has been the subject concern for several years and one we reported last year.

Several major players, such as Network Rail, BP and a water company have joined thousands of residents and dozens of local councils in registering their opposition. The issues are mostly around the control that National Grid, who claim the link is needed to bring power from new offshore wind farms to the South East and London. Failure to build this will, they say, result in consumers paying billions of pounds for the new wind farms to switch off to prevent them overloading the network.



A link under construction between Wimbledon and Crayford. The East Anglia link is more than five times longer (Image: Jack Taylor for The Times)

The second problem seems to be a small issue about landfill tax is calculated. One of the items in the small print of the latest proposals by our illustrious government changes the way in which Landfill is taxed effectively raises the tax on rubbish going to landfill. The proposals were in November's Budget with the intention of moving to a single rate. However, the proposal would have added about £50,000 to the price of a new house which taken with the manifesto commitment to build 1.5 million new houses, would certainly remove any revenue worries for the Treasury. That part of the whizzo scheme was dropped but in April, the Chancellor doubled the old lower rate and removed exemptions for dredging. The reaction was immediate – ports would silt up, canals collapse, major infrastructure projects would all fail.

Official reaction – A Treasury spokesman said: "Landfill tax provides an economic incentive to divert waste away from landfill and supports investment in more circular waste-management options, such as recycling and recovery. Since 2000, landfill tax

has contributed to a 90 per cent reduction in local authority waste sent to landfill in England.” We await further developments.

OTHER PROJECT NEWS

There is plenty of speculative project news this month, mainly about energy.

➤ **Clean Power problems.** This concerns the target set by Ed Milliband, Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero and the ability of wind farm developers to meet the 2030 target. The story trumpeted in the Press is that some projects will not deliver power in time to meet the deadline.

This is hardly a surprise as several including three of [RWE](#)'s five successful projects are not contracted to start up until the 2030-31 financial year and would be “difficult to meet for 2030” according to Tom Glover, RWE's UK boss. Delivery is not helped by delays in reaching planning consent - the deadline for a decision on the two biggest projects at Dogger Bank has been delayed from mid-January to the end of April. Compare the programme manager's comment with those of Chris Stark, head of mission control for the government's 2030 clean power goal,: “We've secured almost 8.5 gigawatts of new offshore wind capacity, which we can expect to have operating by 2030, so [it] really matters for our clean power goal for 2030.”

There is some hope that delivery could be delivered early if the government moves more rapidly on granting planning consent but also influences the National Energy System Operator to grant it an earlier grid connection date. The government-owned agency is not expected to approve their grid connections until October 2030.

➤ **Offshore Project Problems.** Elsewhere in the North Sea, Shell and Exxon have announced that they are scrapping plans to sell 11 gas fields, an exploration project and the onshore Bacton terminal in Norfolk to Viaro, a smaller oil producer after a complex regulatory review by the North Sea regulator. The fields produce about five per cent of UK gas output was being scrapped because conditions needed to complete the deal “were not met”, according to Shell.

Further afield, a joint venture in the Irish has been declared “no longer economically viable” by one of the partners. Germany's EnBW and BP had planned to develop the Morgan and Mona projects but in the auction that concluded in January, EnBW failed to secure subsidy contracts it has taken €1.2 billion impairment charge, as a result. The joint venture was BP's first foray into offshore wind in the UK. The JV committed to a record price to the Crown Estate when the companies bought the leases in 2021.



Image: BP

After some Boardroom reshuffles and subsequent re-evaluations of options, BP spun off its offshore wind interests into a joint venture with Japan's JERA, called JERA Nex BP, last year.. JERA insists it still has options to develop sites in the Irish Sea despite claims they were no longer economically viable. Meanwhile, BP is writing down its green investments.

➤ **Projects in the news:**

Jensen Potash Project. BHP, the world's largest miner has completed a detailed review of cost and schedule estimates for Stage 1 of the Jansen potash and confirms that the total investment estimate for Jansen Stage 1 will increase by US\$1 billion to US\$8.4 billion (including contingencies) and the first production schedule has reverted to the original schedule of mid CY2027

➤ **Typhoon Programme.** The Ministry of Defence has awarded BAE Systems a £454 million (\$610 million) contract for production of new Eurofighter Typhoon combat jet radars, designed to detect and counter multiple airborne and land based targets.



Image: Ministry of Defence

The contract “marks a major step forward in the Royal Air Force’s (RAF) Typhoon capability,” according to a statement by BAE. It noted that a total of 38 electronically scanning, European Common Radar System Mk2 (ECRS Mk2) sensors are set for manufacture and integration on the service’s Tranche 3 standard jets. The program sits under the wider £2.35 billion Eurofighter upgrade launched by the UK in 2022.

➤ **Railway Overhaul.** Plans for an overhaul of railways in the north of England to cut journey times and improve productivity have been announced by the Chancellor. Before you leap up and down in celebration, the planes which include lines upgrades and a link built between Liverpool and Manchester is part of the Northern Powerhouse Rail (NPR), a scheme to boost east-west rail connections. This has been the subject of much debate and will need a closer look next month to evaluate the project implications.

➤ **Sizewell B life extension.** RWE has claimed that the aging reactor could have its life extended significantly. This is another complex project and one that we will return to next month

CLOSING REMARKS

It seems that wind farms are flavour of the month, so it seems appropriate to close with yet more criticism. The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) claimed that “it is absolute disgrace that public money will be used to support what is predicted to be one of the world’s most damaging wind farms for birds”.

The Berwick Bank project is planned to be built in the outer Firth of Forth around 24 miles offshore. The project will eventually comprise more than 300 turbines and cover an area four times the size of Edinburgh., so the density of turbines is quite small. The contract awarded in January covers the first phase to deliver 1.4 gigawatt with a final capacity of 4.1 gigawatts. It will become the biggest offshore wind farm in the world.



Image: Derrick Z Jackson

This is a contentious project with benefits and penalties disputed on all sides so how it turns out will help understand what many see as imponderable. Modelling indicates that the project could result in the death of some 2,808 guillemots, 814 kittiwakes, 260 gannets, 154 razorbills, and 65 puffins in a single year. The problem is centred on Bass Rock, home to an enormous colony of gannets.

Anne McCall, director of RSPB Scotland, who has called Berwick Bank “the deadliest wind farm for birds”, said: “A development that will kill tens of thousands of seabirds over its lifetime and push species like kittiwakes and puffins closer to extinction in Scotland is unsupportable on every level.”

SSE, the Scottish energy company developing the Berwick Bank wind farm, said: “Berwick Bank has been meticulously designed, and its delivery will combat climate change, which is the biggest threat to seabirds.”

Killing birds is always an emotion laden situation but the decline in puffins is due to reduction in food species such as sand eels rather than impact with wind turbine blades. This is a very difficult conundrum to solve and recent work by the British Trust for Ornithology seems to have produced ideas to minimise bird deaths due to wind farms – let's hope this work continues and is successful. We are seeing the impact of global warming already with the rises in sea level and increased frequency and violence of storms.

We will move onto more cheerful topics next month so keep reading!

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

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