

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



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### INTRODUCTION

The global outlook remains bleak but Spring rolls on; the trees are in leaf, more plants in flower and the sun is shining so there is still cause for optimism. Spring for me is all about renewal, mainly wildlife and the environment, so there is news of some projects related to that. For the more technically minded, I can share some insights on AI, contract management and the latest manifestation of Agile. And on top of all that, there is some good news so I will kick off with that.

### GOOD NEWS

The really good news this month is global, rather British. An analysis by the think tank **Ember**, claims that renewables have overtaken coal in the generation of electricity. Reductions in coal consumption in China and India account for the drop in coal use. The analysis shows that coal accounted for 33%, a record low while renewables accounted for 33.8%.

Despite world events, the project news is mostly about non-military projects and contracts but no doubt these will follow in due course. For now, we have some good news from Wales, air taxis and more:

- **Welsh Rarebit** – The Government, in the shape of National Wealth Fund, has provided £599 million to help fund 3 Small Modular Reactors at Wylfa, on the Isle of Anglesey. The plan is to construct 3 small modular reactors (SMR) on the old nuclear site. Ministers selected the site after signing a £2.5bn partnership with Rolls-Royce to build it last year. Rolls-Royce claim the project will bring 3000 new jobs locally and a further 5000 nationally. When complete, the 3 SMRs should provide enough electricity to power the equivalent of about 3 million homes for

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more than 60 years. **Tom Greatrex**, Nuclear Industry Association chief executive, said called the approval "a historic step for clean power, industrial growth and skilled jobs in Wales", saying Wylfa was a "very special site with unique strengths". "The sector stands ready to help make the country's first SMR fleet a success, putting Britain at the forefront of new nuclear development," After all planning and regulatory hurdles, it is hoped the SMRs will be on stream in the 2030s but is still subject to a final investment decision, which is expected by the turn of the decade. On a cautionary note, it will be recalled that this is an area that rejected another large project over fears that it would harm the speaking of the Welsh Language.

- **Electric Progress.** Vertical Aerospace has announced execution and closing of its comprehensive financing package worth up to \$850 million. This came shortly before they announced its latest operational achievement, the first eVTOL to complete two-way piloted transition – switching from helicopter mode to airplane mode and back again – under civil aviation Design Organisation Approval regulatory oversight. Vertical became the second company globally to complete a two-way piloted transition flight in a full-scale tiltrotor eVTOL and the first to do so under civil aviation Design Organisation Approval regulatory oversight. This



advances Valo's path to certification, targeted for 2028, with entry into service expected shortly thereafter on routes such as Canary Wharf to Heathrow and JFK to Manhattan.

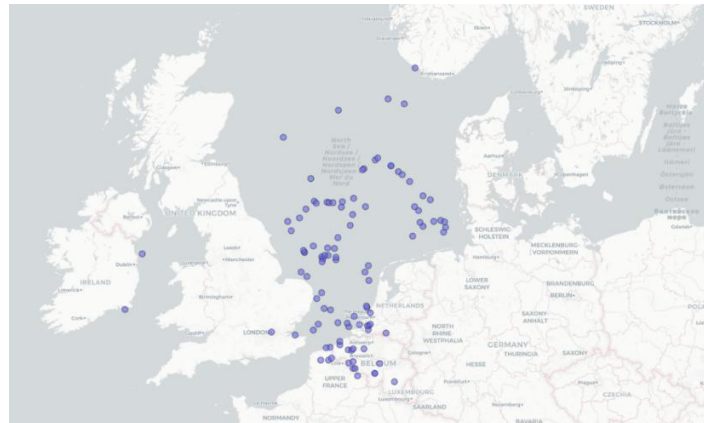
- **More Dosh for Gas.** Rivan operator of UK's largest synthetic natural gas plant has secured backing from co-founder of Wise as it gears up to build Europe's largest plant of its kind. Founded in 2024, London-based Rivan aims to provide an alternative to the fossil fuels used to provide power for heavy industries that cannot

be electrified. The firm aims to provide energy that could be cheaper than the fossil fuel alternative.

- **Concorde Conversion.** Work has started on a project to provide a new arena in Bristol. The Brabazon Hangars, where the supersonic airliner Concorde was built, are being turned into a new live entertainment “destination” . The largest of the three Brabazon Hangars entire complex, will house the new venue, expected to be called the Aviva Arena. The whole complex will house a conference and exhibition space. Named YTL Live, it is expected to contribute an estimated £1 billion to the wider Bristol economy over the first decade of operation.

## **NOT SO GOOD NEWS**

- **Job Opportunity.** In an unusual move, Government Ministers have sacked Chris Gibb, a rail industry veteran and a non-executive director of the nationalised train operator. News emerged of his departure for allegedly breaking media engagement rules. My Rail Imp tells me that the reason relates to his appearance before politicians and industry representatives at the All-Party Parliamentary rail group in Westminster this month. Commenting on plans to reduce the length of HS2 trains. He apparently said that the plans would likely inflate costs, slow services beyond Birmingham and result in fewer seats. According to *The Times*, he underlined that he was commenting in a personal capacity, but chose to speak out on account of feeling “obliged to offer leadership by example and to act in the public interest”. Regular readers may recall that we reported last month that the contract to build the new, 400 metre long trains was to be amended as some platforms are only 200 metre long!
- **Too Young to Read.** In a worrying sign of the times, my Parliamentary Imp brings to our attention an age related problem for the Project World. This is not linked to aging of project managers but a former Labour minister who has admitted he “didn’t read the contract very carefully” and said he was only “30 years old” at the time. A note to project sponsors: Make sure your younger project managers can read, especially those under the age of 30.
- **Off Shore Oil.** It may seem churlish to criticize a Government sponsored app aimed at helping beleaguered motorists find cheap fuel but some of these motorists are challenged by locations recommended. The app shows the price of fuel on petrol station forecourts. However, as the graphic (below) from The Times shows, many are a difficult drive.



## OTHER PROJECT NEWS

- **Noses and Faces** – My Contract Management Imp has brought a rather strange situation to my attention. Rumour has it that the Government is seeking advice on abrogating a highly successful contract with US data management contractor Palantir. They won a £300m contract to create a data platform for the National Health Service (NHS). Naturally this was strongly opposed by the British Medical Association (BMA) and provokes continuing intense debate. However, the contract has been highly successful and has made serious inroads into treatment waiting lists. Government moves come in response to Palantir's engagement with the US Military. This has been compounded by a 22 point "manifesto" by the unfortunately named co-founder and chief executive, **Alex Karp**, who has criticised the belief that all cultures are equal and called for universal national service. Alex Karp also called the disarmament of Germany and Japan after World War Two an "overcorrection", backed AI weapons and condemned "ruthless exposure" of the private lives of public figures. What to do? His views, widely shared on X are, shall we say controversial but the product is valuable, some would say essential – as **Tom Bartlett**, who previously led the NHS team responsible for delivering the Federated Data Platform as it is "*uniquely suited to the messy NHS data problems that have been accumulating over the last 25 years*".
- **Renovation Planning** –The debate over renovating the Houses of Parliament rumbles on and even the Newspapers are putting their ideas. Amazingly, even The Times is recommending that "we" should follow the French and restore the old heap "*in style and to a tight timetable and schedule*". This comes after an esteemed member of the Fourth Estate observed a mouse in the House. Apparently, Members of Parliament have been debating what to do since 2012. This seems a long time, even for politicians and so far, the timescale and cost estimates have climbed astronomically.



Image: Terry Ott <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=122737498>

A note of caution is appropriate when recommending Continental models – the revamp of the Palais de Justice in Brussels has run on since 1984 and the cost to date tripled to €600 million. Meanwhile, we await a real plan, not just back of the fag packet guesses.

- **Renovation Planning** – One of the issues in devising a plan is to identify the skills needed and where they will come from. The good news is that the skills are available, as evidenced by an impressive restoration of the Christchurch Gate at Canterbury Cathedral. Despite the good news associated with this project, and many others based around British cathedrals, these places have well developed masonry teams. The requirement for restoration projects at places like the Houses of Parliament, and more significantly at the large number of heritage sites need a range of skills that are hard to acquire, requiring long training and specialist knowledge. All is not doom and gloom as HM The King has long recognised the need to build the skills based and has taken steps to encourage young people to gain the skills. We live in hope!
  
- **Make Mine a Mythos.** Just in case you thought AI was not going to feature, let me raise the topic. First, the good news (I hope), the Association for Project Management (APM) have raised an interesting question and asked what its members would trust AI to do for them. We await the answers with some interest!

A far more worrying development is what is happening with Claude. For those who have yet to encounter Claude, I can assure you he is not a real person but an AI implementation. Claude was created by **Anthropic**, an AI safety and research company founded in 2021 by former OpenAI employees. You might wonder why Claude is important and the answer is that in its original form, it isn't. What is



important is its new variant, Mythos. Well travelled readers will know that Mythos is a well known brand of beer in Greece. Not so well known is that it is also an ancient Greek term for "story," "tale," or "narrative," representing the "speech" or "discourse" of a story, rather than just a false rumours. Seems an appropriate name for an AI implementation. Developed by Anthropic (see above for more on them) The company says it found the tool can outperform humans at some hacking and cyber-

security tasks, which has prompted discussions by regulators, legislators and financial institutions about the dangers it could pose to digital services. There are plus points as Mythos can spot weaknesses in counter hacking defences but this can also be exploited by the Black Hat hackers. This makes the APM question even more relevant.

## CLOSING REMARKS

**Bats and Newts** Not a line from Shakespeare but a tail of delay. It is well known that some birds of prey nest on cliffs. In UK, cliffs are in short supply so the birds tend to seek artificial sites such as tall buildings. Where I live, we have a resident pair of peregrine falcons nesting on the spire of the Cathedral. In central London the local Peregrines are using tower blocks as nest sites. The developers of a 21 storey office block near the Barbican have been warned that their project must pause while they determine whether Peregrines are nesting at the site, 1 Silk Street. If they are, work on the £450 million project will have to be halted until the birds depart. This is a blow for the Government who are trying to reduce so-called bats and newts blockages.

**More Teeth for Wild Animals.** Another international even of note comes as UK and 130 countries passed 40 new rules that will safeguard many migratory species including whales, sharks and birds.

**Heathland Bridge.** Part of the M25/A3 interchange, which was opened last month is a 68 metre "green bridge" across the A3 dual carriageway. It cost £3.7 million and connects two rare heathland areas so that snakes, badgers and deer moving between the two areas.



Image: Highways England

Cockcrow green bridge, the country's first heathland bridge consisting of a 25-metre-wide wildlife corridor. The project was ten years in the planning, the Wisley interchange is one of the most significant since the M25 opened in 1986. There is also provision for pedestrians, cyclists and riders. There are also two underpasses built for toads, while local badgers have apparently been living in an artificial sett provided by National Highways.

### Looking Ahead

My Technology Imp has been looking at the implications of AI in the project world so next month we will look at some AI related projects, And I will be back from visiting the Lincoln Imp!



## 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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