

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



**By Dr Miles Shepherd**

*Executive Advisor & International Correspondent  
Salisbury, England, UK*

### INTRODUCTION

You have probably heard too much about the various Seasons here in UK but as we move into what is widely known as *The Season*, I should mention it and provide a little background. This follows in the Odds and Ends, which covers some items from the project world that didn't fit elsewhere. Elsewhere we look at some changes at APM, rather more good news than we have had for a few months and some old favourites in the form of HS2 and red tape return.

### ODDS AND ENDS

- **The Season.** This starts with the delivery of a major project, the Chelsea Flower Show, reported last month and ends with the start of the Lawn Tennis Championships (you might call it Wimbledon, but my Manners Imp dictates otherwise). There are lots of interesting social events including the King's Birthday Parade (some call it the Trooping of the Colours), Royal Garden Parties and the like, all of which are technically projects although many of the Project Managers would not accept this accolade.
- **Projects Ancient and Modern.** Stonehenge has emerged as probably Britain's oldest project, even older than HS2 or Hinkley C! We had confirmation some years ago (reported in these pages – see my profile in the PMW Library) that there were several stages to the construction but now we have evidence that a previously unknown R&D phase took place just before the main construction started, about 500 years before – this may also be evidence of the planning issues faced by the Neolithics which show little changes.

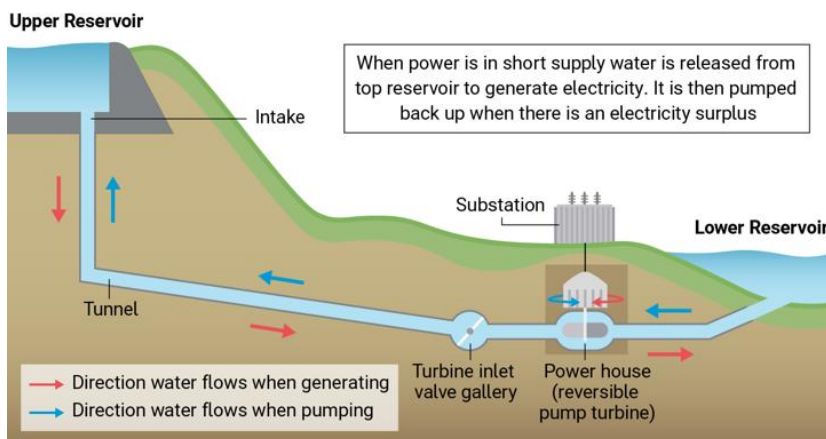
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## GOOD NEWS

- **Planning Progress 1.** Two projects have cleared early hurdles. **First**, a strategic review carried out last month by UK Sport reported that UK could host an Olympic Games in the 2040s. It has been reported that HM Treasury has agreed in principle to a second round of work. Sensibly, the next stage is intended to what a bid to the International Olympic Committee would entail. What is encouraging, from a Project perspective, is that lessons learned from other Games are informing the assessment. Using the Brisbane Games “hub and spoke” approach allows planners to propose a model that uses facilities in Manchester, Liverpool, Leeds and Bradford. This plays well to the aspirations of the current Government and its potential new leader.
- **Project Planning 2.** No less than 16 long term infrastructure projects have been approved by OFGEM, the energy regulator. All relate to pumped hydro energy storage and are intended to improve domestic power supply and lowering. These involve long-duration storage systems to balance unpredictable wind and solar power. Ofgem published the results of its first round of applicants on Friday and hopes to encourage the development of 16 projects, representing 7.645 gigawatts (GW) of capacity.

### How pumped hydro storage works



Graphic by The Times and Sunday Times. Source: ILL

A “minded-to” list provisionally selected schemes to receive backing under the “cap and floor scheme”, which provides developers a guaranteed minimum income while limiting how much profit they can keep. The report suggested there would be further

decisions on power storage providers to come, subject to consultation and decision by 2027.

- **High Speed JCB.** Older readers may recall 15 Oct 1997 when Wing Commander Andy Green reached an official average speed of 763.035 mph (1,227.986 km/h) driving the British-built, twin-jet **ThrustSSC** (SuperSonic Car). He is at it again, this time in Hydromax. Powered by two hydrogen gas-fuelled engines based on JCB’s 3CX Backhoe Loader, this beast uses engines tuned from 80hp to 800hp each, for a combined total output of up to 1,600hp. The JCB team has been turning

up the wick a little at a time at RAF Wittering, where 208 mph was achieved, and expects to reach 1,200hp by the end of June. The Backhoe Loader normally hits a dizzy 6mph, but the Hydromax is intended to reach 350 mph at Bonneville Salt Flats next month.

- **Giant Arises.** We are blessed in my part of UK as we have a good range of ancient monuments, so Stonehenge is not the only one. One of the others resides in the village of Cerne Abbas and has been under threat from the elements. The good news is that a project to restore its “integrity”.

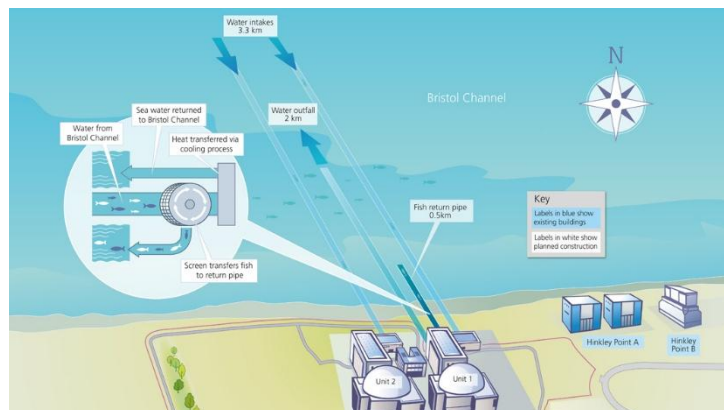


Managed by the National Trust, the hill carving dates from the late Saxon period, between 700 and 1110 CE my Scientific Imp informs me. However, local folklore and early theories previously claimed the 55-metre chalk hill figure was an ancient pagan fertility symbol or a Roman depiction of Hercules. It is now fit for a few more years after a major restoration effort by Trust volunteers.

- **SMR Success.** Rolls-Royce have won a major contract to provide 3 small modular reactors (SMRs) to Sweden in a multi-billion £ deal with state backed firm Vattenfall. These SMRs, rated at 470 megawatts each, will add about 6% capacity to Sweden’s annual power capacity. The first unit is expected to come on-line in the mid-2030s.
- **Pharma Successes.** AstraZeneca has reported “positive” results from a mid-stage trial of elecoglipron, its leading weight-loss drug. The firm told an American Diabetes Association conference in New Orleans about results from two trials which open the way to full trials and public release. AztraZeneca is based at Cambridge, where there is exciting news of a vaccine developed using AI. Researchers at the University of Cambridge have released results of “the first human clinical trial of a universal Sarbeco coronavirus vaccine”. This opens the way to develop vaccines that can protect against future mutations of viruses. These “universal vaccines” could protect against a wide range of variants of a particular family of viruses such as Ebola or coronaviruses, including those that have not yet evolved and emerged, academics have said.

## NOT SO GOOD NEWS

- **Nuclear Red Tape.** Readers world-wide were shocked at the demands of Natural England, a government QUANGO with wide ranging powers to block anything new. Initial demands were to adopt extreme measures to protect fish in the Severn Estuary, an area not notable to its



extensive fish stocks, resulted in a £700 million hit for EDF to construct what is known as a fish disco. Now Natural England have decreed that the disco is not adequate and slapped a new demand on EDF, this time to fund salt marshes. It is difficult to understand how this unnatural requirement will aid fish, and some may feel they will benefit birds more than fish. While I'm all for protecting birds, pescatarians note that birds eat fish, so the fish stock faces a new threat, especially as more sea eagles are scheduled to be released in the area. This is a real growth area as the next logical step is to force the power company to fund anti-bird measures.

- **Construction Red Tape.** This is a perennial issue as any construction in a crowded space such as UK brings challenges. We have seen a major development in London's Peckham abandoned as one of UK's biggest housebuilders, Berkeley, have said they "can no longer invest" in the capital after an application to build almost 900 homes in southeast London was rejected for a second time. The Council decision has been referred to a Judicial Review. This rejection is one of many in the Southeast. In Kent, the Northfleet Harbourside mega-project, a 3,500-home regeneration scheme, pitched as a large-scale brownfield renewal with homes, offices, retail, a hotel and a stadium, became highly contentious and was the subject of government-level scrutiny with the housing secretary due to decide the project's future later this year;
- **Heathrow Runways Red Tape.** We have already had innumerable formal inquiries into how to provide much needed expansion at London's Heathrow Airport. After Government decisions to allow a third runway, the objection industry is gearing up for further long term delaying activity. Thus, Bechtel, the American construction firm, has reported that Heathrow's proposals to build a 3,500-metre third runway as part of a £49 billion privately financed project to almost double the airport's capacity by 2035 is impossible to deliver on time, and the project is likely to run into complications including the relocation of several angling lakes. Is anyone surprised?

- **High Speed 2 (HS2).** No doubt you all feel a sense of Déjà vu here! My Misery Imp did not tell you last month about the latest problem to befall the world's most expensive rail project. There has been another "reset" of the project budget, and it could cost more than £100 billion despite trains travelling more slowly than promised and they might not run until 2039. However, Project chief executive (new term to me) has hedged all bets as another problem has emerged: the British weather. He is reported to have said that he hoped to lay the first piece of track on the 140-mile London-to-Birmingham line by 2029. But he acknowledged this aim was "highly weather dependent" and a "deluge of rain" could push it off track.

## **OTHER PROJECT NEWS**

The failure of major projects is not just a British preserve as the case of the Future Combat Aircraft System (FACS) shows. This €100 billion plan to develop the aircraft was a joint venture on the grand scale between France and Germany. The general view for the last few years was that the project was dead and the disputes over whose aerospace manufacturers would get which slices of the pie were intractable.



Press reports suggested that respective governments were reluctant to abandon the project so the project simply stumbled around in a state of advanced zombification (The Times). This must have been frustrating as other collaborative projects in the United States, China and Sweden and between Britain, Italy and Japan flourished.

There was a general air of relief when the decision was taken in early June to drop the project and an MP in Germany's Christian Democratic Union (CDU) party, said: "The decision to end the FCAS project was overdue and should have happened a good deal earlier." However, this was not a universal view and another (Green Party) MP said the outcome was "more than bitter". She said: "In this serious global situation it is a big setback that European co-operation didn't work here."

## **PROFESSIONAL SOCIETY NEWS**

**Association for Project Management** has had a full range of activities in June, including their headline conference in Coventry. This focused on the theme "*Projects for a Better Future: The Power of Clarity*," addressing climate change, emerging tech, and social equity. It is getting quite hard to follow APM activities these days as news is scarce on the website, so it is important to keep an eye on Facebook and LinkedIn.

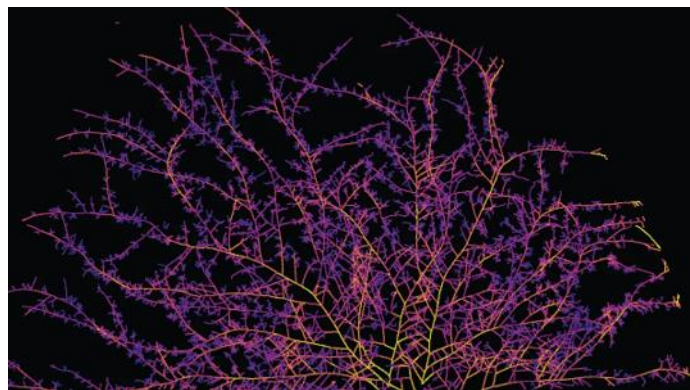
A sign of the times, no doubt but many readers will be pleased to note that Project Magazine is now available online from the website.

**Project Management Institute UK** held its Sustainability Summit online. This built on previous summits and was intended to move from awareness to execution. This summit is a call to action. Success is no longer defined by time, cost, and scope alone, but by the value we create for people, planet, and prosperity. According to their website, this year's summit challenged project professionals to lead differently, act boldly, and embed sustainability into everyday delivery.

### **CLOSING REMARKS**

Readers will be grateful to scientists at the University of Bonn who are working on why pigeons have great navigational skills. I'm not sure I understand the science, but this is clearly a project that President Trump will feel indicates a reduced European reliance on US military support.

My science Imp has been busy as we learn of further projects to reduce US reliance, this time the world wide web. An international collaboration by SPUN (Society for the Protection of Underground Networks) has mapped a colossal web of threads in the soil which enable trees and plants exchange nutrients. The image left is from SPUN and shows the structural mapping of a segment of the fungus.



This network is distributed throughout the world, in the soil around the globe, connecting the roots of trees and plants. According to the SPUN research, the network consists of a special type of fungus that has formed networks totalling 68 quadrillion miles in length — more than 700 million times the distance between the Earth and the sun. The report has been published in the journal Science and highlights the ecological importance of the fungus in

The Times commented in a significant op-ed: *They will also play a role in future human wellbeing. Fungi are excellent at carbon sequestration. They strengthen plants' resistance to drought, salinity, pathogens and toxins. These labourers in the dark help to structure, bind and aerate soil. Some strains of fungi can digest petroleum hydrocarbons and degrade plastics. Spores of the turkey tail mushroom tested in a Devon river sponged up 80 per cent of the E. coli bacteria in sewage. Another fungal dam caught 83 per cent of the phosphorus from fertiliser run-off in its watercourse.*

And finally, a Celtic note to end this report. Wrens living on some of Scotland's remotest islands have grown to almost twice the size of their mainland cousins according to recent research. Scientists from University of Birmingham found strong evidence of "island gigantism" in wrens from Shetland and St Kilda.

Researchers studied four island subspecies of British wren, found on Shetland, Fair Isle, the Outer Hebrides and St Kilda. Those in Shetland and St Kilda were the most genetically distinct from their mainland cousins. They were also the biggest. The Wren is one of Britain's smallest and most familiar birds. However, while an English wren typically weighs about 7-10g, those on St Kilda weigh 13-16g.

Next Month we will return to cover new nuclear projects and

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## 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](mailto:miles.shepherd@msp-ltd.co.uk).