

UK Project Management Round Up¹



By Dr Miles Shepherd
Executive Advisor & International Correspondent
Salisbury, England, UK

INTRODUCTION

This has been a truly remarkable summer. On the world stage we have witnessed a major programme that comprised a series of national projects (FIFA World Cup) and we have also witnessed two eclipses – one solar and the other lunar. A new soft skill has emerged that may have significance for Project people (more of this later) and the weather patterns in many parts of the world have been radically different with droughts and wildfires as well as further catastrophic melting of Himalayan glaciers that has resulted in a devastating flooding in Nepal that has claimed hundreds of lives, displaced thousands of people and caused indescribable devastation to property.

Nearer to home, major projects are getting on with their work, we learn of some new projects and there is success for a project we reported on earlier in the year. A number of major construction projects have also hit major milestones.

GOOD NEWS

High Speed 2 (HS 2)

Good news and HS 2 are not often linked but HS 2 engineers have completed the first major phase of work to launch the Duddeston Junction Viaduct over the Birmingham to Derby railway lines. This milestone is the beginning of a project to cross six railway tracks – three freight lines and three passenger lines. Planned completion is some time next summer.

Duddeston Junction is the first of five interconnecting viaducts, known as the Curzon Approaches, which weave through Birmingham's industrial districts on the approach to Curzon Street Station. The structure follows a varying horizontal curve and has a three percent gradient, rising from the ground to sit 12 metres above the existing

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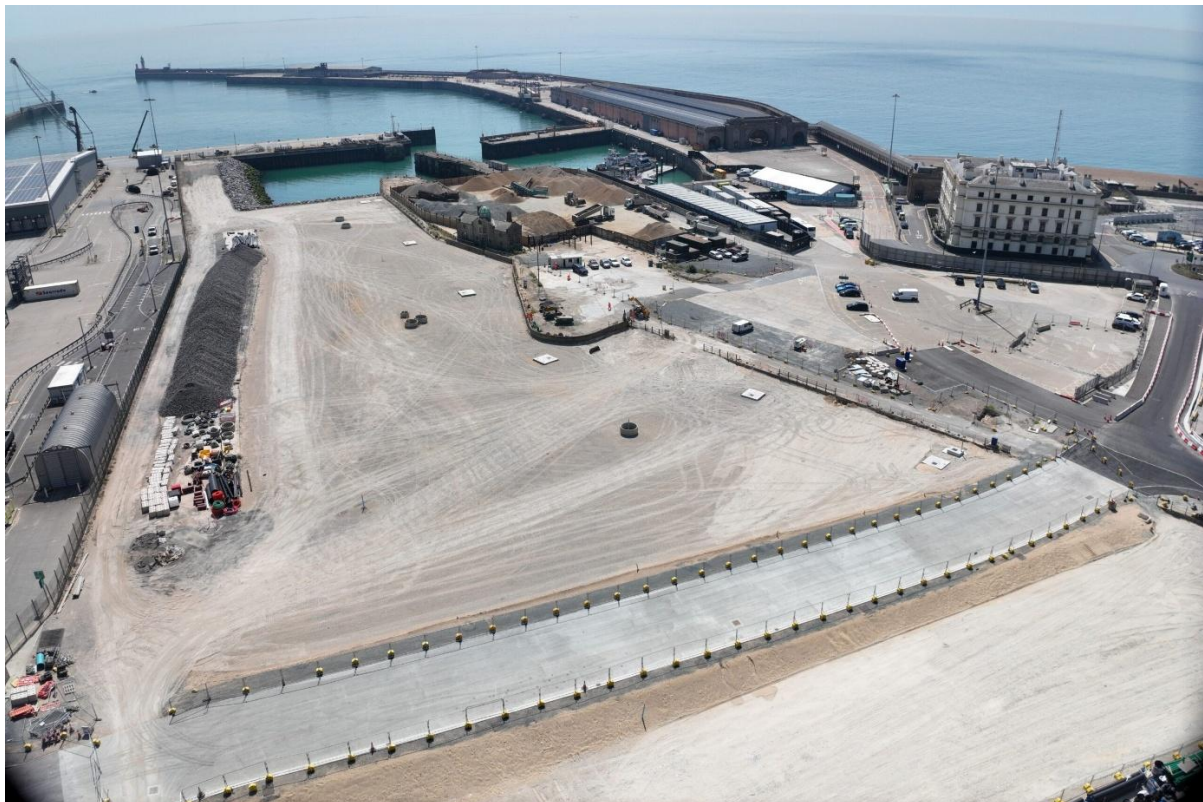
tracks. This makes construction, logistics and alignment significantly more challenging.

In August, the engineering team behind the build and launch operation reached their first major milestone, as they successfully launched the first 170 metres of the 700-metre-long structure over two key freight lines that transport goods into the city.

Dover Western Docks Revival Phase 3b

The Port of Dover is Britain's busiest port, with the Western Docks containing the cruise terminal, EU Entry Exit facilities and the newly renovated cargo and marina facilities. The DWDR project has created land for future development, supporting the Port of Dover in delivering its 2050 masterplan.

This part of the overall project created 10Ha of new port land, requiring nearly 900,000m³ of infill material to raise the dock bed to approximately 0.5m below the level of the existing quay walls. The project commenced in 2024 and involved the reclamation of land within the Wick Channel, Tidal Basin marinas and Granville Dock.



*Dover Western Dock on project completion*Image: New Civil Engineer

The work was priced at £53M and was carried out under a joint venture partnership between **McLaughlin & Harvey** and **Boskalis Westminster** with McLaughlin & Harvey as principal contractor on the project.

Works included the removal of pontoons, gangways and associated equipment from within Tidal Basin and Granville Dock, together with the demolition of some existing quay wall structures, including the North Pier and the Ferry Jetty. New utility and road infrastructure was installed throughout the project area, including substantial drainage works and a complex stormwater pumping station.

Charing Cross and Waterloo East Engineering Programme

This programme developed by **VolkerRail** consisted of an extensive package of track renewal works in which nearly 2km of track and 16 sets of points were replaced. Rail infrastructure projects require enormous coordination as safety requirements lead to line closure to separate engineers and trains. This programme was delivered during a 22-day closure of the route into central London, enabling Charing Cross and Waterloo East stations to reopen.

Delivered as part of the Southern Renewals Enterprise alongside Network Rail, the works will support a more reliable and resilient railway. In addition to the track works, **Network Rail** and VolkerRail delivered repairs and repainting to Hungerford Bridge and the Waterloo East footbridges, while extensive platform renewal works were carried out at Charing Cross station.

West Country Mine Investment

The **National Wealth Fund** has announced that is investing up to £71 million in Tungsten West, a mining company focused on restarting the Hemerdon Mine. Situated on the outskirts of Plymouth Tungsten West is aiming to mine tungsten and tin from the site they acquired in 2019. Current plans are to reopen the mine after rising costs and a low market price for the mineral forced the company to put plans on hold in 2022.

The financing consists of a £36 million equity investment alongside up to £35 million of lending, supporting Tungsten West with the construction, commissioning and processing costs associated with restarting production.

The investment also unlocks an exclusive negotiation period giving UK Government the right to procure up to 50% of the mine's tungsten production, stated in its 2025 Feasibility Study, securing a vital domestic supply of tungsten and reducing the UK's reliance on imports. The offtake agreement is being negotiated separately by UK Government.

Jonathan Reynolds, the business secretary, explained: *"This is about the government working in partnership with business and in businesses there are packages that are based around rewarding success. They will only get those rewards if they succeed and of course if they do succeed there's a good outcome for the state as a result."*

Tungsten is an extremely hard metal, used in the defence, aerospace, next-generation energy and electronics industries, with 80% currently produced by China. The mine

is seen as a strategically significant asset. The company hopes to be at full production by the end of March 2027 in a project which would create 350 jobs and secure access to the mineral used in defence.



Image: Hemerdon Mine

In an interview with the BBC, Plymouth Sutton and Devonport's Labour MP Luke Pollard said: "Tungsten is important in national defence as an armour-piercing metal... it's used in missile production and a whole array of defence applications."

Pollard, Minister for Defence Readiness and Industry, added: "It's because of that and because the world is getting more dangerous and critical minerals like tungsten are more valuable and in demand that the government has stepped in to make an investment in Tungsten West."

He said it would "allow the UK to be more resilient" in challenging times. "If the world is to be more dangerous, and we know that it is, we, as a country, need to be able to secure our own supply of these minerals," he said.

More Mines in the West

Mining has a long history in the West Country and at Kit Hill, a famous 19th-century tin mining area in Cornwall, seams of tungsten richer than Tungsten West's are being tested 400 metres underground by Strategic Minerals. Kit Hill is about an hour's drive from Hemerdon and still only a test drilling, but the project manager **Rowan Thorne** is convinced of its promise. He says *"I've worked in Spain, west Africa, east Africa, Canada, and I can honestly say the geology here is perfect,"*

Not everyone agrees with the investment at Hemerdon and potentially at Kit Hill. Andrew Monk, chief executive of VSA Capital, a specialist in mining companies, was remarked that the Hemerdon mine was “very tricky to process” and, like most UK mineral deposits, would struggle to be competitive. His preference is funding “*world-class assets in countries friendly to the UK*”. He claimed “... project in Namibia has the ability to be significantly larger than Hemerdon and much easier to mine and process. It’s also in a country where mining is much easier due to the sparse population”, This last point may be an issue in NIMBY Central UK!

UK Productivity

This is another unlikely report as usually we hear dire warnings about the poor level of UK productivity. Now we learn that output per hour which forms the basis for productivity growth, has increased at the respectable annual rate of 1.1 per cent over the past two years. This is in sharp contrast to the dismal 0.2 per cent fall implied by official statistics, according to a report released this month by the **Resolution Foundation**, an independent, non-partisan British think tank based in London. It focuses on improving living standards for low- and middle-income families.

The Resolution Foundation analysis is supported by a separate analysis from the Centre for Economic Performance CEP). This is hardly surprising as the CEP analysis is based on the same data sources as the Resolution Foundation. The CEP calculates that annual productivity growth expanded at a rate of 2.37 per cent between the third quarter of 2024 and the first three months of 2026.

The Resolution Foundation analysis is based on RTI payroll data from HMRC and tax returns from self-employment which it claims is more reliable than the data used by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) which uses data from its labour force survey. Readers may recall that we have reported on more than one occasion that ONS employment data has been regarded as unreliable because of low response rates since the pandemic. Corrective action is in hand but the transformed labour force survey (TLFS) is not likely to be in place until next year.

Productivity growth, based on a worker’s output per hour, is central to ensuring long-term prosperity and rising living standards, and acts as a stabilising force on a government’s public finances.

NOT SO GOOD NEWS

Key Project Funding Threat

The UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) is the national funding agency that invests in science, research, and business innovation across the United Kingdom. It supports a wide range of projects and funds continuing work for some key interventions, including the Eden Project and Jodrell Bank. Like all government agencies, it reviews its spending periodically.



Jodrell Bank Telescope

Image: Getty Images

In the current funding round, grants to some long standing recipients look like being sharply reduced, including the world famous Jodrell Bank Radio Telescope. The original project began in 1945 when Bernard Lovell's trailblazing efforts in 1945 to repurpose discarded military equipment to investigate cosmic rays. Now a UNESCO world heritage site and Grade I listed, it's not going to be

suddenly demolished.

Construction began in 1952, but five years later the project was in deep trouble. There had been multiple delays and the design had had to change to meet new scientific and engineering challenges. By 1957 the telescope was hugely overbudget, many had lost faith in the project and Lovell began to doubt that his vision would ever be realised. However when the USSR launched their satellite in 1957, the near-complete telescope at Jodrell Bank was the only instrument in the world capable of locating and tracking the carrier rocket that had launched Sputnik – an intercontinental ballistic missile.

Since then, Jodrell Bank has amassed a huge range of scientific discoveries so it fills a major part in our scientific heritage. More to the point, it is instrumental in attracting new recruits to the ranks of science thanks to its excellent Centre for Engagement, it is still enthralling 150,000 visitors a year, including 25,000 children on school trips — the astrophysicists of tomorrow.

The telescope belongs to the University of Manchester which also provides most of the money to run it but as higher education institutions struggle with funding, future discovery projects are threatened. It seems perverse to restrict funding when challenges such as global warming are affecting us all so dramatically. The unique combination of world class research and appeal to future generations needs support.

HIGH SPEED 2 (HS 2)



This is not about project failings (for a change) but strategic plans. As reported last month, we have a new Prime Minister (NL to avoid confusion) which was expected to lead to new government projects. Surprise, surprise! NL proposed to reinstate the HS 2 line to Manchester (remember he used to be the Mayor

of Manchester). Long term readers may recall this rapid branch line was cut from the project plan on one of the many “re-sets”.

As expected, this has raised eyebrows politically with some critics concerned that the planning mistakes of the original plan might be re-enacted on this revival. Others have adopted a more prosaic view that the funding is just not available despite the obvious advantages of route planning, existing land purchases and strategic fit. The cost has been estimated (back of the envelope method, one suspects) at around £45 bn. Experts also claim any extension would result in slower trains and a possible increase in local business rates.

Project Collapse

The London Resort project featured in one of our reports in 2023. The plans (see artists impression, right) included 50 rides and attractions, including ones inspired by BBC shows including *Doctor Who*, a restaurant based on *The Godfather*, a 5,500-bed hotel and one of Europe’s fastest rollercoasters, themed around



an extinct flying reptile, the Quetzalcoatlus. Costed at £3.5 billion the London Resort claimed to be part of a deal with Paramount, the Hollywood studio. Predicated on forecasts of 12 million visitors a year and expected to create 30,000 jobs, it collapsed in 2023, leaving behind more than £100 million in debts.

The power behind the project was Kuwaiti businessman Abdulla Al-Humaidi. Unsurprisingly, he later said the project had “destroyed my life”. It certainly proved to be a catastrophe for its creditors.

He acquired Ebbsfleet United back in 2013, hoping to take the non-league club into the English Football League. After a tumultuous 13 years. The club is back in the sixth tier of English football, the same level as when Al-Humaidi acquired it, having survived more than a dozen winding-up petitions from HMRC.



It has recently been alleged that Al-Humaidi was the mystery driving force behind Northfleet Harbourside, one of the UK's most significant housing projects. (see artists impression, left) The project ended in failure after a public inquiry refused planning permission amid concerns about health risks posed by a local lead

refinery and the impact on a nearby industrial estate.

You might be wondering what all this has to do with projects, and the answer is not a lot technically but allegations of using the Football Club as a front for money laundering. It is claimed that Al-Humaidi paid funds via the club that were the proceeds of what the Court said were from a “criminal source”. This calls the role of the Project Sponsor into question. Perhaps such a huge investment turned out to be the Emperor's New Clothes and overrode governance principles.

NEW PROJECTS

Margam Castle redevelopment project

This £1.375million project is at the bidding stage and Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council is seeking a conservation architect-led multidisciplinary design team for the National Lottery Heritage Fund project 'reimagining' Margam Castle. The project plans include repairs to make the structure wind and watertight; reopen rooms and spaces that have been closed to the public for over 50 years. The project will also build a new 70-capacity café, create exhibition areas, and improve overall site accessibility and last, but by no means least protect the local bat population residing on the historic grounds.

Gwynedd and Anglesey Structures & Coastal Maintenance

Cyngor Gwynedd has awarded its Framework 2026, covering the general maintenance of structures and coastal assets, major projects and specialist geotechnical engineering services.

OTHER PROJECT NEWS

There have been a number of what I can only term “oddities”. The first was guidance issued by Octopus Energy who exhorted us to avoid using appliances during the solar eclipse because the eclipse “knocks out” some of the country's solar power supplies. Octopus said the eclipse would hit when “millions of people are getting home and electricity demand is climbing”. It urged customers to “delay the dishwasher, save the laundry till later, don't bother with the oven”

The second oddity could be a new soft skill for PMs to help with stakeholder management. The new skill first emerged in Brazil where it has attracted a cult following amongst Gen Z practitioners. My Overseas Imp neglected to say whether these enlightened practitioners are actually project people but as we are usually early adopters of new trends, they might have been. Anyway, this new skill is called **Aura Farming** and the idea is to strike a pose. And not just any pose, but one which captures the idea of a personal “aura”. Cool, composed, cocky and — ideally — effortless, sounds very PM like. There are images of practitioners of this new skill set but they are too cool for this journal.

CLOSING REMARKS

Jelly Fish Threats. While we in UK have QUANGOs to impose restrictions on operations, particularly nuclear operations, the French rely on observation. My Travelling Imp reports that three reactors at Gravelines nuclear power plant activated a safety protocol as a precautionary measure over fears that a vast swarm of jellyfish could clog water cooling systems. The protocol was introduced last year after a similar invasion forced the entire plant, near Dunkirk to be taken offline for ten days. In the south of USA, plants have had problems with crocodiles (or perhaps they were alligators, I did not get close enough to be sure)

Natural recolonisation. It is not unusual for Ospreys to breed in England with well known nests in Poole Harbour on the south coast, at Foulshaw Moor in Cumbria and Ranworth Broad in Norfolk. Nevertheless it is welcome news that a pair of these birds successfully hatched three chicks at Campfield Marsh, a wetland on the shores of Solway Firth, in Cumbria, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) reported. Most osprey pairs usually only have a single chick in their early breeding years so it seems likely this is a mature pair.

Hopeful signs

One of the rarest birds of prey in this country is the Montagu’s Harrier, or Montys as they are colloquially known. They used to be a regular if infrequent sight in Wiltshire, where I live, but in recent years conservationists feared that the bird was no longer breeding in Britain. In a recent posting, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) reported that two Montagu’s Harrier nests were established in Britain.

The nests, located roughly one kilometre apart, are home to three chicks fathered by the same male mating with two females. This bird was ringed some 10 years ago and has been identified as one that nested last year. For months, the RSPB has monitored these nests at a secret location to conserve this migratory species that flits in and out of national extinction.

No Montys bred here between 2020 and 2023 which threatened to cut UK raptor species down to fourteen. It also reflects a wider downward trend in some parts of the global population. However, working closely with birdwatchers and farmers, the



RSPB's conservation project is again delivering results, with one pair breeding in 2025 and a further two nests established this spring. The RSPB ringed all six chicks and fitted two with satellite tags to ensure continued monitoring

Beavers to the rescue

Living in a tourist hotspot brings me many encounters with overseas visitors who frequently remark on the vagaries of British weather, usually bemoaning the frequent rain. This year the remarks are all about the lack of rain! We have been in drought conditions for weeks; those living in hotter climates will know all about the problems this brings so it is very good news that some of the de-extinctions have begun to have an impact.



It is therefore welcome news to learn that the family of beavers released at the National Trust's 5,000hectare (12,000acre) Holnicote Estate in February have made contributions. Intended to help developing a climate-resilient landscape that delivers for wildlife, water, carbon and communities, the family have been busy doing what beavers do – building dams. This has prevented

water loss in key parts of the estate. There are now 20 beavers in the area and their work has established a 75 acre "beaver meadow" that provides a habitat for voles, common cranes and white tailed eagles.

According to Ben Eardley, National Trust project manager says: *"Beavers are extraordinary partners in our work to restore nature at scale. Over the last few years we've seen how their dams and wetlands transform the landscape, create habitat and help buffer both floods and drought."* There are calls from the Wildlife Trust' chief executive Craig Bennett to release beavers into every catchment in England withing the life of the current Parliament, De-extinction on a grand scale!

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.