

# The Power of megaprojects

The background of the slide is a photograph of four business professionals in a meeting. A woman in the center is smiling and holding a pen. A man to her right is also smiling and gesturing with his hands. A woman with glasses is on the left, and a man is partially visible on the far left. The scene is set in a bright, modern office with large windows in the background. Two decorative wavy lines, one yellow and one green, curve across the bottom of the image.

Because when projects succeed, society benefits

# Introduction

Megaprojects pull together different organisations to ensure successful delivery – often of new infrastructure. Such projects rely on collaborative working between temporary partners who often go their separate ways once the project is completed.

There are usually substantial risks involved in megaprojects, including financial and reputational. Their size and scope brings great complexity, but also spurs innovation (whether technological, procedural or in terms of problem-solving).

Delivering a megaproject is therefore a very different proposition to managing other types of project, requiring unique approaches. This paper, which is based on conversations that took place at the Association for Project Management (APM) Project Summit at Windsor Castle in autumn 2025, shares insight from experts who are leading some of the biggest megaprojects in the UK.



# Contributors

This paper is based on insights shared at APM’s Windsor Project Summit. The discussion was led by:



**Professor Eddie Obeng PhD, MBA**

Eddie is a professor at the School of Entrepreneurship and Innovation at the Henley Business School, founder and Learning Director of Pentacle, The Virtual Business School, and a leading business theorist, innovator and educator.



**Alison Baptiste CBE, Director in the National Infrastructure and Service Transformation Authority (NISTA)**

Alison is a Director in the National Infrastructure and Service Transformation Authority in the Treasury which is the government centre of expertise for project delivery. She drives standards, improvements and pace in government’s biggest and riskiest projects. She was a co-author on the government’s 10 Year Infrastructure Strategy and is leading the implementation of the new Social Infrastructure Roadmap. Alison also leads the cross-government forum on Service Transformation programmes.



**Laura Church, Chief Executive of Bedford Borough Council**

Laura joined Bedford Borough as the Chief Executive in October 2021. Bedford Borough Council is a unitary authority and is one of the few areas nationally to have an elected Mayor. Starting her local government career as a trainee planner, her main experience has been in “place” related responsibilities with a particular focus on town centres, neighbourhood regeneration and economic development. Laura has been leading on the work with Universal Destination Resorts and their investment in Bedford Borough (UK).



**Andy Mitchell CBE, Chief Executive of Tideway**

Andy was appointed CEO of Tideway in 2014 and was formally appointed to the Tideway Board on Licence Award in 2015. He joined the project from Crossrail where he was Programme Director and a Board member. He has worked around the world, including developments such as Hong Kong Airport and Hong Kong West Rail. Andy is a Fellow of the Royal Academy of Engineering and the Institution of Civil Engineers, and former Chair of the Infrastructure Industry Innovation Platform (i3P), the Infrastructure Client Group (ICG), and Co-Chair of the Construction Leadership Council.

# Set up for success

It has often been said that projects don't go wrong. They start wrong. It may sound obvious to state that getting things right from the start will improve a project's chances of success, but establishing scope and purpose can be all too easy to get wrong.

Setting up a project for success is as much about asking the right questions as it is about taking the right actions. Particular attention should be paid to gaining clarity on scope and the overall goal; what will success look like for this project?

- **Have clarity of scope**
  - Scope should be defined in the planning documents.
  - Tight control should be kept over variations.
  - Ensure clear process for change when it's unavoidable.
- **Have a well-developed social ambition**
  - Develop a narrative early – what do you want the story of this project to be?
  - Identify and share the benefits of the project – ideally this should include an element of social benefit (e.g. sustainability, local investment, community enhancement, etc).
- **Have effective governance and capability**
  - A culture of trust is an important part of project success. Project leaders can play a role by clarifying responsibilities, facilitating open and honest collaboration, and observing team interactions to predict and prevent conflict.
  - Governance should enable rapid decision-making. Continuity of people will support this, along with clear, regular communication with all stakeholders.

Andy Mitchell advised: "There's no mileage in taking on games you can't win...if it's going to take a miracle [to deliver], it's not going to work. That's not just about time and cost. It's all of the things that can influence a project.

"Get yourself set up in the right way. But if you find yourself in a place where things aren't looking good, admit that, acknowledge that and figure out what happens next. Don't just heroically plough on."



# Learn from successes... and failures

The National Infrastructure and Service Transformation Authority (NISTA) is a joint unit at the heart of UK government, reporting to both HM Treasury and Cabinet Office. NISTA's role is to build resilience and confidence in the Government's capacity to manage its portfolio of 213 major projects (the Government Major Projects Portfolio, or GMPP).

Alongside the Office for Value for Money, NISTA is reforming the GMPP to put focus on the UK government's most complex and strategically significant projects and megaprojects.

At APM's Windsor Project Summit, NISTA Director Alison Baptiste shared three examples of where and how NISTA is learning lessons that will help it unite long-term strategy with best-practice project delivery.

- **Alliances in defence** – NISTA has emphasised collaborative behaviours and common vision on defence megaprojects such as the delivery of aircraft carriers and Dreadnought-class submarines. Forming an aircraft carrier alliance and Dreadnought alliance enables lessons to be applied from multiple client organisations, aligns interest with suppliers and creates greater transparency around project risk. This does require more management effort however, due to the intricate commercial arrangements and the need for compromises.
- **Sizewell C** – Sizewell C is a planned nuclear power station on the coast of Suffolk, England. Lessons from other megaprojects being applied here include use of the Regulated Asset Base (RAB) financing model, which guarantees investors a return on investment for the asset's lifetime; and near-duplicate design of reactor to the Hinkley Point C nuclear power plant. Baking lessons learned into Sizewell C from the start is helping maximise efficiencies. Sizewell C targets 20% productivity benefits over Hinkley Point C.
- **HS2** – HS2 (Britain's new high-speed railway connecting London and Birmingham) is rated 'red' by NISTA in its most recent update. The Stewart Review, published in June 2025, highlighted issues which NISTA has accepted, including escalating costs, capability and trust issues, and weak assurance and oversight.

Alison categorised the lessons being learned as:



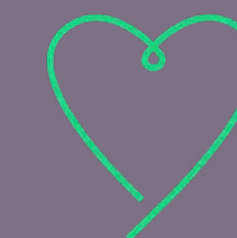
## Head

Think things through from policy to delivery.  
Capable leadership – recruit, retain and recognise expertise.



## Hands

Use tools and experience to create realistic estimates, monitor and provide effective assurance.



## Heart

Have courage to present the truth to power to overcome vanity and/or reluctance to face reality.

She commented:

"As project delivery professionals, if we get it right at the beginning and get the hard-headed views of what we're delivering and what's needed, if we use the tools that are available to us and we have the heart – the courage – to stand up when humanity's foibles get in the way of common sense and sensible decisions, then we might get more successful project delivery."

# Manage complexity

Bedford Borough Council is the local authority for the Borough of Bedford in the East of England. The borough sits at the heart of the 'Oxford-Cambridge Arc'; a region where several current and upcoming megaprojects are taking place, from two new towns with 40,000 homes each, to the new East West Rail connecting Oxford and Cambridge, to the Universal UK project to build the first Universal-branded theme park and resort in the UK.

These projects and others represent an investment boost for the UK of tens of billions of pounds, along with the creation of thousands of jobs and new infrastructure.

Capitalising on these benefits while managing and mitigating impacts is a balance act the authority must strike.

Bedford Borough Council's Chief Executive, Laura Church described the importance of 'place leadership'; a collaborative, non-hierarchical approach where leaders and stakeholders from different sectors work together to address local challenges and drive development.

She said: "By managing stakeholder relationships on behalf of Universal, we've embedded them into the local area with colleges, universities, all the local communities around us, engaging through consultations that we've supported.

"The role for us in that place leader piece is making sure we get the benefits without the disbenefits like traffic, parking, concerns about property prices. We're managing that over the length of these projects...when you think about building new towns, that's a long period."

many projects taking place, Laura answered: "We [Bedford Borough Council] are dependent on the project leads for those projects engaging with us and talking to us. We've reached a position where they do want to talk to us and they understand that we will contribute.

"It's about engaging with other projects, pulling it together, sharing information and communicating. Quite often in my world, it's not communicating that's the problem. People will imagine what's going on, the problems and the difficulties. We have to be really clear with those messages."

## Information shared by Universal Destinations & Experiences as part of their Universal UK Project illustrates the value and benefits megaprojects can deliver, both nationally and for local communities



# About APM

The Association for Project Management (APM) is a professional membership organisation that sets the standards for the project profession and raises its profile. APM is the only chartered organisation representing the project profession in the world. As a registered charity, APM delivers learning and networking opportunities, qualifications, research, resources, events, and best practice guidance for the project community, helping the profession deliver better.

APM currently has over 42,000 members and more than 470 corporate partners based across 140 countries.

## Additional resources

- [Blog – How to set a project up for success](#)
- [Blog – Invisible barriers to megaproject success](#)
- [Research – Governance of institutional complexity in megaproject organizations](#)
- [Research – Championing and promoting innovation in UK megaprojects](#)





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