

Company news, June-November 2015

Welcome to the first company news issued by the trustees. Up until now a summary of our discussions has been posted in the forums but we are conscious of the fact that not all members may read the forums and others may also not wish to express their ideas and opinions in that public arena.

The summary below speaks for itself. It is our intention to circulate, via email, similar notes after each set of minutes has been approved. Please note that we have included an email address at the end for you to communicate directly with the trustees.

In the life of a charity certain 'milestones' are commonly encountered as they develop. At each of these stages it is important that trustees reflect on their actions and ask questions of themselves. Geograph has reached a point where we have to plan for funding needs, and manage change. Research has shown that only "49% of charities surveyed produce a yearly or longer term plan". I am pleased to report that we have the makings of such a plan now in place. However, having a plan does not guarantee success but I would like to assure all the members that we trustees are all working towards finding a way to secure the future of the project whilst at the same time allowing all members, and other users, to enjoy the site that they have come to know so well.

Sebastian Ballard (Chair), 1 February 2016

Meet the Board

1: Elected by the company members, the eight directors of Geograph Project Limited and trustees of the charity are: Sebastian Ballard (Chair), Richard Croft, Michael Dibb (Treasurer), Peter Facey, David P Howard (Company Secretary), Barry Hunter, Christine Johnstone and Robin Stott.

Aber and after

2: At the Annual General Meeting, held at Aberystwyth, 27 June, David kept Robin firmly in order at his last AGM as chairman. Robin thanked his fellow-directors and everyone who made a contribution to the project during the year, and for the support he has always enjoyed. Referring to the role of the board he pointed out that the company is the charity: its objects are those of the Geograph project, which is realised solely through the websites. The board, on behalf of the company members, is responsible for the whole. Christine was elected and Michael and Peter were re-elected as directors.

3: At a quick meeting of the board straight after the AGM Sebastian was unanimously elected chairman, proposed by Robin as outgoing chair and seconded by David. We later scrapped a meeting scheduled for September because life was getting in the way.

Banbury, 23 November 2015

4: Sebastian referred to informal meetings he had convened during the autumn to establish the main issues the board faces. He presented a draft outline strategy for the board to consider. It was subsequently agreed to spend the second part of the meeting working on the document whilst we were all in the room together. Sebastian asked Christine to lead the session: it is a process in which she is well versed. Five responsibilities are being addressed: the resources for delivering the websites; financing the project; fulfilling our educational remit; improving outreach; and the websites themselves: their functionality and usability.

5: We need this document, not only to guide us but to demonstrate to members and others, such as potential funders, that we are a competent board that is planning for the future of the project. It will be used to set the agenda for each meeting, to clarify the role and responsibilities of each trustee and in the future will be a starting point for any newly elected member of the board. We will continue next time on an updated draft. To maintain momentum we decided to meet more frequently: every two months or so. Face-to-face meetings are essential despite the distances some of us have to travel.

6: Two pressing, interrelated concerns are (1) Geograph's dependence on Barry, which he himself recognises, and (2) removing the burden of system administration that he undertakes voluntarily with help from a handful of members. Barry continually manages our servers and the bespoke software that controls them to deliver the Geograph websites to our computers and other devices. A prolonged search for a volunteer helper has drawn a blank. The tech team (Barry, David, Peter and Robin) is tasked with finding a contractor to provide a continuing service. The funds to pay for it have also to be found.

7: Among other items, dealt with quickly to make more time for work on the strategy, Michael advised us of policies we should prepare to comply with Charity Commission guidelines; Michael and David are working on draft policies on Risk Management, Investments, Conflicts of Interest and Complaints Handling. They will be making use of the guidance notes available on the Charity commission website.

Barry reported installation and configuration of the two new servers bought with members' generous donations: particular thanks are due to Richard Humphrey (RH3) for whipping up a frenzy of giving.

Robin reported on feedback from an informal survey of 30 new contributors.

David updated us on the plan to introduce more useful terms than the 'supplemental' classification. In some respects a minor change, it has proved a complex issue, hence much slower progress than we had hoped. There are still some loose ends to tie up. Company members will be informed before implementation.

We also agreed that, because of declining attendances at our conferences, the 2016 AGM will be held during a social occasion on Saturday 25 June; a venue is being sought.

Next meeting: Banbury, 19 January 2015.

Your feedback

We have no idea how this first summary will be received. We are answerable to you, the company members who elected us. With a private bulletin board we could all see each other's responses. However, there will inevitably be some discussion in the forum. That is one place for feedback but if you would prefer to comment directly to us, please email trustees@geograph.org.uk Either is welcome: many thanks. In the interim we will discuss how we might respond.