

Geograph Newsletter 15

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Editor's intro

Welcome to the 15th Geograph Newsletter.

Last time I wrote an intro, back in April 2020, I began with the words "We are living in strange times, with restrictions on our movement as the threat of illness hangs over us all. The Trustees would like to take this opportunity first of all to send best wishes to all reading this, with the hope that you are staying safe and staying at home."

These comments, sadly, still apply, and we wish to reiterate our message of good wishes to all. Surely come the spring we will have better news – or at least I hope so!

This Newsletter has an extremely important announcement from our Treasurer, Michael Dibb, and so it is the leading article. Please consider how you may be able to respond to it. The future of the Project we all love and enjoy using depends on the goodwill of us all.

Treasurer Michael Dibb's message

Your donations are needed.

The costs of running Geograph in the Cloud are higher than was anticipated. Similarly the cost of systems maintenance are higher than expected.

As will be recalled, it was part of the Geograph strategic plan to move to the Cloud. It was thought that the migration could be done gradually over a period of 12 months or so. It was estimated that the running costs would be either broadly similar or somewhat higher than the costs of using our own servers.

Our servers were located in a secure data centre operated by a company called Fubra. When Fubra gave us six weeks notice that the data centre would cease operating the move to the Cloud became a matter of great urgency.

Barry and Tiger Computing Ltd (who provide our systems maintenance) were able to migrate the system to the Cloud within the deadline and great credit is due to both of them for this.

Although everything possible is being done to reduce the operating costs in the Cloud, they are considerably higher than was calculated.

Briefly our costs for 2021 are estimated to be: Cloud hosting £15,000; Systems Administration £8,400; Insurances, Administration, etc £2,000 - A



total of £25,400.

Our income for 2020 was £21,600 and this figure was only achieved with the help of a 'Get Geograph to the Cloud' appeal which contributed some £9,000 of that figure. Thus it can be seen that, even if donations remained at the same level, there would be a deficit of just under £4,000. Obviously if donations fall below this figure then the deficit will be greater.

To try to overcome this situation, we are taking action on three fronts.

Firstly:

This appeal to contributors and members asking them to make donations and ideally make a regular monthly donation. This appeal will be distributed to all company members. In December, 46 regular donors donated £435. Many more regular donors are needed to produce a substantial regular income. Regular monthly donations can be made via VirginMoney, via PayPal or direct to our bank account by standing order.

If you already donate regularly can you spare a few quid more each month?

Secondly:

In March we will run a Wikipedia style appeal for donations aimed at users of the site rather than contributors. One was run in 2018 and raised almost £3,400, one run in 2019 raised almost £1,900.

Thirdly:

We are launching a serious research programme to ascertain the possibility of having advertising on the site.

It is known that having advertising on the site will be anathema to some. Despite years of trying we have been unable to attract sponsorship, neither have we been able to secure a grant. Advertising would seem to be the only avenue open to us other than donations.

As one long time contributor wrote on this forum a couple of years ago. 'All we can do is keep on raising appeals. Personally, I get a lot from Geograph. It gives me a purpose in going out taking snaps. It gives me somewhere public to lodge them; it's nice to think that what you're taking can be seen. And the Geograph Project itself I feel is doing something worthwhile, something for both now and the future, and I get something out of supporting that. So I'm happy to keep on supporting it by regular donations. Others obviously feel the same. So it really is up to us to do what we can to make sure the project continues.'

We trust that you are safe and well in these extraordinary times.

On behalf of the Trustees
Michael Dibb
Treasurer

News from around the table

Christine

I have been learning how to chair virtual meetings and bring discussions to a conclusion when they are not face-to-face! Its always interesting to tackle something new - whether its Zoom or a detailed exploration of the local footpaths during lockdown.

We have all welcomed Bill Harrison and David Martin to the Board.

Mark

I've continued to deal with data protection/privacy issues as they come in as well as providing legal advice on other matters where needed. I played a small part in the cloud migration by trying to break Barry's various "staging" sites and gleefully reporting back if I succeeded.

Stephen

Personally, my lockdown project, like that of many other members, was to record my local area in more detail in the course of the many local walks I took in the spring and summer. I even managed to 'complete a hectad' for the first time and despite the travel restrictions in force for much of 2020 I submitted more photos than any previous year. Writing as one of the trustees, the team of volunteer moderators continues to work hard to ensure submissions are checked and processed promptly, and change suggestions considered carefully. Several of us met socially on Zoom in January and we hope to have more of these virtual meetings, even when lockdown ends, since we are spread too widely across the UK to meet in person.

Peter

As usual, I have been taking the lead in handling complaints from landowners and there haven't been many of these recently. I also did a little work testing Barry's staging site, as did many others. I have also produced a user manual for the osTicket complaints system, so that newer trustees can be brought up to speed on it.

Bill

I live and work in Aberdeen and joined Geograph in 2007. My photographic interests include historic buildings, churches, heraldry and geological features and I look forward to supporting Geograph as a Trustee.

Barry

The last few months have basically been working on completing the migration to the cloud. The main migration is now done, we are already fully running in

the cloud, but there is still some work to reduce ongoing costs, as well modernise the code, to make it more robust and future proof. The new system is overall working well, and is significantly easier to maintain, and robust. But not without its challenges! Right now the active work is dealing with daily outages early morning (but Sunday is particularly bad with issues persisting for most of the day) , which I am still working on and addressing. I am shortly going to put out a new call for volunteers to help test the whole site - as it is completely new - working on the new version. A lot of code has been modernized/rewritten so needs thorough testing.

[Huge thanks once again due to Barry, without whom the site could not function. Ed.]

David

I joined the Geograph Trustees in July 2020, having been a contributor since April 2007 <https://www.geograph.org.uk/profile/13502>. I'm also a Geographer in my day job, having worked for the last 30 years in geographical information systems - particularly on the areas that now underpin the UK census and small area official statistics. Over the last decade much of my photography has been taken alongside travel to academic Geography meetings and conferences around the UK, as well as a fair amount of narrowboating and a lot of walking. At the time of writing we are all rather constrained by pandemic restrictions but am incredibly fortunate to have the New Forest reachable from my door. Geograph has taken me to very many interesting and beautiful places that I would never otherwise have seen and I'd been wanting for a while to put something back into the project that has provided me with so much enjoyment. Over the last few months I've been getting to grips with the breadth of issues dealt with by the Geograph Trustees, learning to appreciate a variety of systems and challenges – and the dedicated work of many volunteers – of which I previously had only a hazy awareness.

Ruth [Ed.]

I have agreed to take forward the initial research, mentioned by Michael in his appeal, into how – and indeed whether – advertising of any kind may be an appropriate generator of income for the site. I would be particularly interested to hear from anyone who has had successful dealings with this on their own websites.

I am still very interested in your ideas as to how we could take the Facebook page and group forward. I belong to several Facebook special interest groups, and these are lively and dynamic fora, and have engendered a real sense of friendship and community among their users – hugely valuable over the past few months in particular. Perhaps the Geograph Forum is doing this so well that the Facebook “community” is less important. Please let me know what you think.

Geograph used in academia

Richard Humphrey, whose stunning winter scene is our photo this issue, spotted a twitter item showing an interesting academic use of Geograph's images to research tranquility. It is always good to see academic use of Geograph as it strengthens our case for being a charity. See Richard's forum thread <http://www.geograph.org.uk/discuss/index.php?action=vthread&forum=2&topic=32165&dontcount=1&page=0#1>.

Contact us

Please do get in touch with us with any comments or suggestions. The address is **trustees@geograph.org.uk** or **you can comment in the Forum**.

Image credits

Winter reflections in The River Delph - The Ouse Washes near Welney
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The directors of the company and trustees of the charity are:
Mark Anderson, Stephen Craven, Michael Dibb (Treasurer and Company Secretary), Peter Facey, Bill Harrison, Barry Hunter, Christine Johnstone (Chair), David Martin and Ruth Sharville.