

Company Newsletter No 9

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Welcome to the latest edition of the company newsletter. Looking back, I note how the format has evolved: No 8 became more a series of bullet points. We weren't happy with this and have reverted to a narrative style. As always we welcome your suggestions for improving this form of communication.

It never ceases to amaze me how much is continually going on behind the scenes to nurture the project. The role of a trustee is becoming more demanding of our time but then perhaps that is just the pressure we put upon ourselves. We will soon be reviewing our strategic plan and its time frame.

There are two points I'd particularly like to draw your attention to: firstly the contributor survey. At the time of writing we have had over 550 responses – many thanks. If you are a regular contributor and have not yet completed the survey please do so: it will help us.

Secondly I am extremely pleased at our link up with the EDINA project at the University of Edinburgh which has resulted in the photos from Geograph being made available within 'Digimap for Schools'. This widespread exposure through the Digimap site can only be of benefit to Geograph. It will act as a reminder or introduction to many schools across the country at no cost to us.

I hope many of you will be able to make the journey to Bristol for our AGM on 26th June. Further details can be found within the forum. Thank you for your continued support of the Geograph project.

Sebastian Ballard, Chair, 7 May 2017

Work in progress

Fundraising

By the time we met on 21st March, trustees had brainstormed (by email) ideas for sources of funding, only 16; more ideas will come. Suggest something! Christine proposed that in the short term we focus on those that will yield unrestricted funds and require least management time. Interim results from the current contributor survey indicate that we broadly agree – we should be trying a number of potential sources. Several ideas depend on promoting the project and the website before the funds will flow in. We'd welcome some help in this area.

Surveys

Many of you will be aware by now that we conducted an online survey of visitors to the website. The results confirmed the impression of an audience mostly from the UK who use the site to explore where they live or areas they might visit. They are particularly interested in history, maps, geography and the environment, both built and natural. Almost all would recommend Geograph to other people. Now we can say to funding bodies, sponsors or advertisers not only who our audience is but that we've done a survey to find out – evidence not impressions. Thanks to Christine and Barry for making the survey happen once we'd recognised the need for it.

You will be more aware of the current survey of registered site users. It was emailed out on 23 April to everyone who has uploaded a photo in the last three years – 1,767 contributors. The results will tell us about your attitudes and experience on a range of issues: that will help us sharpen the focus of

projects, plans and funding bids. If you've responded already, thank you; if not, please check inboxes, spam and junk folders. Thanks also to Barry and Robin for getting the survey out.

Educational aspirations

Sebastian and Robin met over Easter to share thoughts and feedback about a new version of the website for schools. We now have a better concept of who it's for and what it will offer. If you would like to try your hand at curating content, there's a forum thread for it called 'Help us to help schools'.

Ordnance Survey's product 'Digimap for Schools' now displays Geograph images. The idea came out of a brainstorming session at OS when some of us visited last July. It has been a collaboration between Barry and EDINA, the Edinburgh University team who produce the Digimap software. Early feedback has been enthusiastic.

Website content

The first of Robin's face-to-face meetings with moderators took place on a Sunday in April in Oakham, Rutland. He was struck by their readiness to meet, talk freely and suggest changes, as well as giving advice and sharing know-how. It was as much a workshop as a discussion about the moderation service and altogether fruitful. Kate Jewell, Penny Mayes, Stephen McKay, Alan Murray-Rust and Robin met in the congenial setting of the Lord Nelson pub. The intention is to meet moderators in other regions of Britain. Finalising detailed arrangements may take a while.

There are many places on the website, on public pages and behind the scenes, where users enter text. Authors can be tripped up by different character sets; the hamsters cannot always display characters correctly; they may even go on strike. For example, the character set for the forum is comprehensive whereas the tagging box cannot handle diacritics (accents etc). Barry proposed to start work on a standard character set across the site. We readily agreed to pay for the necessary training on encoding issues.

Complaints by owners or occupiers of property are expertly handled by Peter. Non-intrusive photos of a property clearly taken from a public place or a public right of way will be robustly defended. Photos clearly taken while trespassing, or where there is doubt, will be removed from the site. Most owners accept these outcomes. A rare few feel that their privacy has been violated and their security threatened by the mere taking of a photo, let alone it being on the internet. We have to explain to them that Google Earth and online bird's-eye views show far more of their property than our photos can. In a recent case an owner was placated by removal of the name of his house from the photo title. In another, the divorcee owner attempted abusive and obscene amendments to the title and description of a legitimately-taken unintrusive photo. After consultation it was decided to take it down – one photo in five million – to avoid legal action, reputational damage and persistent unpleasantness. In a far worse recent case the millionaire owner of a new house threatened the photographer by email, abused and threatened a trustee by email and phone, and threatened Geograph itself. Two photos were removed. We cannot take the risk when money talks. Don't get involved with such people. Transfer all details of a complaint to a Contact Us form and let us handle it on your behalf. The advice must be, when photographing a property, to keep at a polite distance and be on a public right of way or in a public place.

Website delivery

We decided not to proceed with a proposal to back up our databases, at a cost. We already back them up on our own servers. Other tasks are ongoing.

Reality bites

In reviewing action points at each meeting we've become conscious of how many items we carry forward to future meetings. It's not because we're lazy – the many actions and deadlines we set ourselves last year were over-optimistic. When we meet in the summer to review the strategic plan we expect to allow ourselves a more extended time-frame. This should result in shorter agendas, shorter meetings (or more time for fuller discussion) and shorter minutes. The broad objectives of the plan flow from our role and responsibility as trustees to sustain the project into the future.

Company matters

Present at board meeting, 21 March 2017: Sebastian Ballard, Michael Dibb, Peter Facey, Barry Hunter, Christine Johnstone, Robin Stott. Apologies: Steve Fareham.

Chair

Sebastian invited us to share our thoughts about the resignation of recently-appointed trustee Steve Fareham. Steve regretted that his other commitments did not allow him to devote the necessary time to the role he volunteered for. Steve's gravitas will be missed; we wish him well. We accept that we need not only to recruit more trustees but to give them more support and background information. Christine will put some ideas together and consult. We'll identify potential trustees from the results of the contributor survey.

Company Secretary

Michael confirmed the arrangements for the 2017 Annual General Meeting: Monday 26 June at the Holiday Inn Bristol City Centre, Bond Street, BS1 3LE. We agreed the Annual Report and Accounts for 2016. They will be circulated to company members towards the end of May. We set a date for the 2018 AGM: Saturday 30 June 2018; location and venue undecided as yet.

Treasurer

Michael had circulated a report for February showing that regular donations are steadily increasing. Good news! It extends our breathing space for securing income from other sources.

Sebastian Ballard

Chair

We welcome your feedback at trustees@geograph.org.uk

Geograph Project Limited is a company limited by guarantee registered in England & Wales No 7473967, charity No 1145621, registered office 49 Station Road, Polegate, East Sussex BN26 6EA. The directors of the company and trustees of the charity are: Sebastian Ballard (Chairman), Michael Dibb (Treasurer and Company Secretary), Peter Facey, Barry Hunter, Christine Johnstone and Robin Stott