



Reach and Swaffham Prior Community Network

Minutes of the AGM held on 3rd September 2012 at The Dyke's End, Reach

1. Attendees

James Matheson (Chair), John Chalmers, Paul Catling, David Greenfield, Hugh de Lacy, Linda Kirby, Michael Limb, Jonathan Cook.

2. Apologies

Andrew Hall, Kate & Peter Whiteley, Nick Acklam, Bryan Pearson.

3. Minutes of Previous AGM 25th October 2011

Linda Kirby requested a minor amendment: page 3, line 16 change 'some relevant financial assistance could be made available' to 'some relevant financial assistance could possibly be made available'.

The minutes were accepted with the amendment above. It was agreed that matters arising could best be covered as part of the ensuing meeting.

4. Chairman's Report

Membership has grown steadily throughout the last year and now stands at 105.

Business users are making a very substantial contribution to running costs and have contributed to a healthier state for RaSP finances compared with the end of last year.

Thanks are due to David Greenfield and Hugh de Lacy who have implemented the majority of new installations over the past year. Thanks also to all members of the support group who have freely given their time to ensure reliable running of the network. Note that there's expenditure of nearly £1.5k on Fenway for the just more difficult aerial installs which gives some indication of the real costs involved.

RaSP will probably need a further bandwidth upgrade in the medium term to serve increasing use of video streaming; however the current performance of 5Mb/s symmetrical connection compares very favourably with local phoneline based services of around 2Mb/s download and 200kb/s upload speeds.

Coverage of the fenland area between Reach and Upware were improved with the installation of a new access point at the Doe's; a further new access point has recently been installed of Heath Road, Swaffham Prior to provide service to a number of potential new clients.

Replacement of ageing equipment has proceeded more slowly than hoped: the hardware for the new mail server has now been purchased and the software has been installed; migration of email accounts to the new server will commence shortly. It has been decided that old emails will not be transferred to the new server but they will be continue to be available on the old server for a period of time to allow users to transfer material that is important to them. A general announcement about this will be sent out in the near future. Hardware for the replacement firewall has been identified and will be purchased shortly; the hardware will provide significantly increased security (this being clearly necessary in the light of increased recent malicious attempts to attach RaSP systems) and will be covered by a 24hr maintenance and support contract.

There are still some clients using the older AirBridge equipment which struggles to achieve the 5Mb/s performance that the network is now capable of; these systems will continue to be replaced where effort is available.

Discussions have been held with East Cambs District Council about possible access to some funding within the Government's rural broadband initiative. The outcome of this was somewhat disappointing with no immediate funding on offer but this situation may improve in 12 months' time. RaSP will continue to maintain contacts.

Discussions have recently been initiated with Anglian Water and the Churches Conservation Trust to try to gain access to the water tower and St Cyriac's church respectively for the installation of much higher access points that could improve coverage within the RaSP area.

The RaSP system continues to be affected by periodic power cuts. The uninterruptible power supply (UPS) units that have been installed are generally able to maintain service for cuts up to 15-20 minutes but it would be prohibitively expensive to cater for power cuts of several hours.

More volunteer effort would be welcomed by RaSP, let us know if you would like to get involved.

The planning permission for the RaSP antenna tower at Vine House, Reach will be up for review in 2013; hop plants have now been successfully grown on the structure to lessen its visual impact (a condition of the permission).

5. Secretary's Report

Notes of routine technical meetings are now being issued promptly after the meetings to assist everyone in tracking and implementing agreed activities.

Recently effort has been expended on the approaches to the owners of the water tower and St Cyriac's church for possible space for new access points. Bryan Pearson has been driving the approach to Anglia Water; initially this looked promising but they have recently come back to us saying that they don't currently have any spare room for us; this may change in future so Bryan is keeping in touch with them.

The approach to the Churches Conservation Trust regarding use of the tower on St Cyriac's church is at an earlier stage. We pointed out to them that the use of church towers is becoming quite widespread in the UK for the siting of local broadband antennas. They have asked for more information about the size of the equipment, electrical requirements and safety etc. They were recently sent a detailed response to this request and we are now awaiting their response with cautious optimism.

6. Treasurer's Report

Summary accounts were presented showing a current bank balance of over £5k compared with near zero last year (mainly resulting from increased membership income, notably the new commercial installation at Lord's Ground).

The accounts have not yet had an independent inspection but a suitable qualified accountant has now been identified and this will be completed in the near future.

The reconciliation of the accounts relating to rent and rates at Vine House together with FSG's commercial subscription have not yet been finalised; however these items net to near zero so there will not be any significant overall effect on the accounts.

The rental of bandwidth on the fibre from Virgin continues to be the dominant cost; negotiations have been initiated with Virgin on a bandwidth upgrade: the annual additional cost of an upgrade from 30Mb/s to 100Mb/s is only around 15% but Virgin are asking for a one time 'installation' fee of £7,500 which is prohibitive.

The current bank balance and incoming income will allow RaSP to complete the current core equipment upgrades plus further upgrades of the backbone network to improve bandwidth (necessary in advance of a fibre upgrade).

Opportunities to gain some additional funding from Spearhead and the Reach Village Amenity Fund should be pursued.

There have been low-level ongoing issues with a small number of clients who are not paying their subscriptions; RaSP should consider defining a policy and process for dealing with this.

7. Points Arising

DG pointed out that the numbers of customers tends to run ahead of the 'official' number with new installations happening all the time; there are now 110 customers.

DG advised that since the loss of our support volunteer in Upware we now have a new arrival who is keen to get involved, has relevant skills and will soon be active.

8. New Committee

No new nominations have been received.

All existing committee members are willing to carry on for the coming year so the constitution of the committee will remain as it is:

Chairman: James Matheson
Vice Chairman: Bryan Pearson
Secretary: Hugh de Lacy
Treasurer: John Chalmers

Ordinary members: Paul Catling, David Greenfield, Andrew Hall.

9. Charges for the Forthcoming Year

Given RaSP's current strong financial position it was agreed that the standard member subscription should remain at £20 per month. After some discussion it was agreed that commercial subscriptions should continue to be set by individual negotiation with the loose definition of 'commercial' to be a client with multiple simultaneous users.

10. Election of Auditors

JC proposed George Ralph a qualified accountant known to JC professionally – this proposal was accepted unanimously.

11. Any Other Business

LK raised the issue that on a couple of occasions Lord's Ground have not been informed of pre-planned power cuts which have affected the Doe's access point, cutting off Lord Ground's service. It was agreed that RaSP will try to maintain closer liaison with the Does to ensure that prior warning of similar events is received in future. RaSP will also consider the installation of another automated mobile phone based power loss alert system at this access point.

BT fibre at Reach: BT are performing an equipment update on the incoming fibre at Reach. This is at Virgin's request and will primarily involve the rerouting of the fibre via the BT exchange at Burwell instead of using a more lengthy private network (cost saving to Virgin). This should not affect Rasp operation but PC will monitor the changeover and ensure that the original link is not removed until the new one is demonstrated to be fully working.